Ruhr Metropolis, Zollverein UNESCO World Heritage Site, European Capital of Culture RUHR.2010, and European Green Capital – Essen is all of these things. The history of its successful transformation into the greenest city in North Rhine-Westphalia is a role model for many cities in Europe undergoing structural change. Around 200,000 visitors came to the events. The European Green Capital – Essen 2017 presented a diverse programme throughout the entire year, always very close to the green themes and stakeholders, and without moralising. Five themes were placed at the focus of the Green Capital: “My Green”, “My Rivers”, “My Shopping”, “My Paths” and “My Future”.

FROM GREY TO GREEN
The transformation of the city of Essen from a pre-industrial village with abbey gardens and imperial parks into a metropolis of coal and steel, and then into a green city, is impressive. Around 1900, the urban landscape of Essen was shaped by the Krupp cast steel factory, by the chimneys of the coking plants and blast furnaces, by shaft towers and spoil tips. The green development of Essen is inseparably combined with the ideals and aims of the social reforms initiated by Robert Schmidt (1869–1934). Robert Schmidt and other urban planners in the Ruhr Area asked themselves what the ideal industrial city should look like, and how it could be designed to make it a place worth living in for residents. He made skilful use of the exceedingly varied topographical situation of the city; the hills and valleys served as the basis for housing developments lined with greenery. The forests became protected, and green districts were created. Schmidt started a form of urban and space planning in Essen that was oriented towards people and their needs for green spaces, health and recreation.

Another important milestone was and remains the creation of green areas in North Essen, which started in 1975 with the project “Green 14” and was continued as part of the Emscher Park International Building Exhibition (IBA) (1989–1999). The creation of green areas, expanses of water, footpaths and cycle paths, to form a network between the district areas and regions, is part of the current urban development programme, and represents a strategy of integrated adaptation to climate change. This was the focus of the successful programme “ESSEN.New ways to the water”, which incorporated more than 200 individual projects.

The Emscher river and its tributaries are currently being converted from open sewers into near-natural waterways, a multi-generational project.

“... We have succeeded in presenting Essen as a vibrant, sustainable and modern Green Capital of Europe, of which members of the public can rightly be proud. This image has gone around the world. It was the residents of Essen themselves who initiated the process of transformation, and they are a major component of it.”

Thomas Kufen, Lord Mayor City of Essen
THE HIGHLIGHTS

453 projects – including 187 self initiated projects, 56 conventions and conferences and 210 citizens’ initiatives

Around 10,000 people from Essen enjoyed two days at the families and upcycling festival “Paradises & Utopias” in Essen’s Stadtgarten park.

Since 2017, it has been possible to rediscover Essen at 31 view points.

The “BaldeneySteig” hiking trail around Lake Baldeney offers 27 kilometres of near-natural paths, captivating landscapes, and a number of attractions.

“Sustainability – that was the central requirement during our year as Green Capital. We conducted projects that invited members of the public to change the way they think, and which raised their awareness about green issues – without moralising. And we implemented projects that will be visible far beyond the year 2017.”

Simone Raskob, Head of Environmental, Building and Sports Department City of Essen and Head of Project European Green Capital – Essen 2017

Three kilometres of city centre ring road were closed to motor traffic. At the “Day in Motion”, more than 12,500 visitors celebrated a change in thinking. Around 2,000 participants showcased the themes of the Green Capital.

At the families and garden festival “Green up! Altendorf”, 18,500 visitors celebrated the beauties of the Altendorf city district.

Under the motto “Sowing, Harvesting, Eating”, allotments and community gardens, agricultural businesses, farm shops and other Essen-based producers and gardens opened their doors on three days in the spring, summer and autumn.

“The Freiraum Weberplatz”, the open space on Weberplatz square, was the headquarters of the European Green Capital, its information and creative centre, a living and green location in the city centre.

TOURISM

Around 384,000 additional visits by day tourists and 120,000 additional overnight stays were counted in a year that was comparatively weak in terms of trade fair events. And the local recreation park Grugapark looks back on a record year. In 2017, 1.1 million people visited the green oasis in the heart of the city – 7.5 percent more than in 2016.

• 500,000 additional visits to Essen motivated by business and tourism in 2017
• The number of overnight stays increased by 6.9 percent
• Growth of 8 percent in available tours and participants
MY GREEN

Essen is green through and through: more than half of the municipal area is made up of green areas and open spaces, water, fields and urban greens. The diversity of parks and green areas of the city is unique in Germany. “My Green” created the opportunity to present, expand and celebrate this fact.

- In 2017, activities, workshops and cycle tours invited residents and visitors alike to discover community gardens and join in the gardening. Seven additional community gardens were created.
- 109 allotment associations with around 9,000 members from over 40 countries cultivate 8,500 lots with a total area of almost 300 hectares. There were many festivals and activities in 2017, and the Council of the City of Essen initiated an allotment development plan, which aims to safeguard and further develop these gardens for the green future.
- 100,000 flower bulbs and 50,000 perennials were planted along the main traffic arteries of the city to promote biodiversity.

MY PATHS

Cycling accounting for 25 percent of the modal split by 2035 and a change of perspective in transport policy, involving all relevant stakeholders if possible. The European Green Capital – Essen 2017 set itself ambitious targets. The focal points in terms of content included in particular the fields of local public transport / sharing / environmental alliance, cycling, walking and alternative propulsion systems. Throughout the whole year 2017, strategies and options for sustainable mobility were discussed.

- Many projects and activities drew attention to the interests of cyclists, and promoted switching to cycling, for example campaigns, “City Cycling”, the availability of routes and tours, cargo bikes for the neighbourhood, the bicycle exhibition “Essen becomes a cycling city”, the Tour de Ruhr, the new trade fair presentation, bicycle parking garages, promotion and certification of cycling-friendly employers. The Green Capital thanked its cyclists on several occasions: Predominantly commuters were surprised with small gifts at well-frequented cycling hubs.

- Two mobility stations were opened as centrally located hubs connecting not only local public transport, but also other transport options such as rental bicycles, car-sharing and taxis in a single location.

MY RIVERS

A total of 26 renaturalised streams and rivers, and 92,000 cubic metres of the best drinking water every day. The Emscher and Ruhr are two rivers that have shaped life in the city for decades. Abused as sewers during the age of industrialisation, their river landscapes have today developed into local recreation areas.

- Since the Green Capital year, Swimming in the Ruhr has finally been permitted again after 46 years. The project is considered trendsetting for the implementation of the European Bathing Water Directive. The bathing area at Seaside Beach on Lake Baldeney is the first of its kind in Europe for a running waterway, facilitated by a specially developed early warning system.
- Essen cleans up – Less medicines in wastewater: Expired medications belong in the household waste, and are then incinerated, leaving no residues. The aim of the research project is to raise awareness about the responsible handling of medicines.

European Mobility Week

43 partners contributed to 35 projects and a total of 62 activities, thus reaching 5,000 people.

Cycling without Age Limits

843 seniors chauffeured a total of over 1,255 km
MY SHOPPING

A wide range of associations, initiatives and service providers in Essen have long been helping promote healthy eating, saving electricity, and making sustainable use of resources. With 9,000 allotment holders, 17 community gardens and 14 farm shops, the City of Essen has long fulfilled a role model function for urban gardeners. The City of Essen has also been a Fairtrade Town since 2013. “My Shopping” focussed on topics relating to shopping and consumer behaviour.

- On the Day of Good Food there were market stalls, lectures, discussion forums and workshops, and presentations from shopping and food guides.
- The “greenApes” app gave members of the public the opportunity to be rewarded for sustainable everyday actions. This originally Italian social network for sustainability premiered in Essen in 2016.

MY FUTURE

The focal topic “My Future” set itself the objective of making Essen even more attractive as an innovative environmental location, and to promote green jobs in the environmental management sector. In addition, environmental education for both children and adults was high up the list of “My Future”.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Environmental education starts at an early age. This was demonstrated by numerous institutions and initiatives with a wide variety of individual projects, such as the VKJ Discovery Gardens, the “Edible Daycare” project, the Children’s Environmental Newspaper, and “My Green Playground”. Girls and boys created raised beds, planted and cared for colourful gardens, learned about waste separation and avoidance, observed nature together, and much more.

- The Schule Natur biological education centre offers discovery-oriented courses for school classes. More than 45,000 school children attend the courses each year. In 2017 the Nature School was acclaimed as a regional centre in the state network “Education for sustainable development in North Rhine-Westphalia”.
- University of Duisburg-Essen: 300 events and lectures themed the Green Capital with a total of 15,000 participants.

WELCOMING THE WORLD

The year of the European Green Capital was sustainably shaped by meetings on a local, regional and international level. 56 conferences and congresses, with a total of around 12,000 participants performed an important function. In addition to our own conferences and congresses, there were initiatives, networks and even companies that used the Green Capital as an occasion to bring their regular professional events to Essen in this special year. The Ruhr metropolis thus presented itself in 2017 as a dynamic discussion platform on an international level. Essen generated impulses for the professional worlds of architecture, urban planning, sustainable mobility, renewable energies, green and blue infrastructure, and environmental management; and social subjects such as future fairness, food councils and community gardens also found a podium in Essen.

Model city for successful structural change

The City participates in international networks such as the “Climate Alliance”, “EUROCITIES” and the “Urban Transition Alliance”, which Essen initiated together with technical colleagues from the Ruhr Area, the USA and China, and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability as part of the World Climate Conference COP 23. No other German city made as many presentations at the COP 23 in Bonn as the City of Essen.
CITIZENS IN ACTION

Organisations such as Transition Town, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth (operating in Germany as BUND), but also many initiatives that have joined forces as the Essen Environmental Round Table (RUTE), developed specific local projects from the strategic requirements and implemented them. This also resulted in intensified partnerships between the city administration and locally active groups, and strengthened public participation.

“My Ideas, My Projects, My Green Capital” – that was the motto of the ideas exchange. 400 project proposals were submitted by residents of Essen, and the programme subsequently included 210 citizens’ initiatives, which were selected by a jury. All of the topics of the Green Capital were embraced, and translated into projects that were sustainable, original, elaborate, and in many cases surprising and inspiring. These included beautification and clean-up activities, exhibitions and workshops, cooking courses for children, planting campaigns, and the construction of an insect hotel. There were green running groups, green fashion tours, and theatre and recycling activities. Film and photography projects documented the green city of Essen. Community gardening took place, and many activities for children taught them about the urban spaces.

During the Green Capital Day, the district authorities of the City of Essen thus joined with members of the public in redesigning selected locations. This resulted in the high levels of commitment to the environment and a city with quality of life, which continue to be shown by initiatives, associations, clubs, child daycare facilities, schools and private individuals.

“Clean Magic”
A record 17,000 people participated in the city-wide clean-up campaign

FINANCES
A total budget of 16.5 million euros was available to the Green Capital of Europe – Essen 2017. Over 50 percent of this was spent directly on the projects. As public sponsors, the State of North Rhine-Westphalia provided 6 million euros in funding, and the Federal Government provided a further 4 million euros. Sponsors boosted the budget with a total of 1.5 million euros.

PARTNERS AND SPONSORS
More than 50 partners and sponsors supported the European Green Capital – Essen 2017 on the local and regional levels. They participated in a wide variety of ways, including providing sponsorship in the form of financial or material resources, amongst other things. A large number of supporters contributed with their own programmes and projects to the Green Capital or got involved with its content. The project office additionally generated significant media reach.

Over the course of the year 2017, the involvement of three main sponsors, two premium sponsors, six co-sponsors, seven further sponsors, two foundations and 14 project sponsors was obtained. With 2.8 million euros accounted for by benefits in kind, including additional services, and 1.5 million euros in funding, it was only thanks to general and project-specific sponsoring that numerous projects were even made possible.

SUCCEEDING TOGETHER

TEAM AND ORGANISATION
The “Green Capital project office” was established at the end of 2015, and as a staff unit of the Environmental, Building and Sports Department, it was part of the city administration. Under the overall project leadership of Head of Department Simone Raskob, the realisation of the programme was controlled by the project team leaders Matthias Sinn and Ralph Kindel in the project office, as were the communication/marketing, finances/sponsoring, volunteer management, and administration.

Alongside a small core team, specialists were recruited on a needs-oriented basis. A strong sense of solidarity developed in a team that comprised a diverse mix of professions, ranging from sciences to marketing, from finance to HR administration, from sponsoring management and public relations to stage management, and from production technology to programme direction.

With its broad interdisciplinary expertise, the respected members of the Scientific Advisory Committee supported the City of Essen in formulating and implementing its targets. The Wuppertal Institute and the Ruhr Universities Alliance were contracted by the City of Essen to provide scientific support.
The aim was to attract as many visitors as possible to the activities to experience this special year in the city itself. The idea was to improve the image of the city of Essen, while encouraging substantive discussion of the various issues surrounding the Green Capital Award: to be attractive and informative, motivating and emotionalising, surprising and authentic.

- **THE FILM** shows the green city of Essen as no one had seen it before: from a bird’s-eye view. An aerial tour over Essen, with landings to visit people who are living the Green Capital.

- The "**Heimatgrün**" magazine reported on the stakeholders and themes, and announced the events. With a circulation of over 200,000 copies per issue, seven issues were printed, as well as published on the Internet under www.heimatgruen.ruhr.

- The TV magazine "**Heimatgrün TV**" presented the projects, stories and people of the European Green Capital – Essen 2017. Even a video documentary was produced from the extensive material.

- **THE JOURNEY CONTINUES**

  After the conclusion of the Green Capital year 2017, the City of Essen is continuing to pursue its goals. The successful work of the klima|werk|stadt|essen and the experience from the Green Capital will be brought together in future in the newly founded “Green Capital Agency”. The aim here is to develop strategic measures for the long-term pursuit and achievement of the targets formulated in the application. Successful projects from the year 2017 are being continued. These include the citizens’ initiatives, the volunteer network, the "green islands" in the city centre, the participation in European Mobility Week, and environmental education in the Nature School. Working in important networks and the implementation of technical events are also intended to further promote regional and international communication. With a view to the International Horticultural Exhibition 2027, the City of Essen has joined the entire region in the start of a Green Decade.

- **Delegations and journalists** from around forty countries – including the USA, China, Peru, Australia, Namibia and numerous countries in Europe – learned about the development of Essen as a model city for successful green structural change.

- **Volunteers** during the year 2017, 158 volunteers between the ages of 18 and 76 proved their commitment in 1,386 assignments. They worked together enthusiastically: as welcome volunteers, as ushers, as guides and organisational assistants. There were always volunteers in bright blue clothing, greeting visitors to the Green Capital with a smile and representing the City of Essen.

One year as the European Green Capital – Essen 2017
The book “GREEN UP YOUR LIFE” documents the entire Green Capital year, and provides interesting background information from selected authors.
Publisher: City of Essen
Editorship: Melanie Kemner, Markus Pileßning, Sebastian Schlecht
272 pages German/English, Klartext Verlag, 24.95 euros.
The web archive on the European Green Capital – Essen 2017: www.essen.de/ghe2017

All videos are on the “Heimatgrün TV” channel on YouTube