

**José Ignacio Arriba, City Council, Vitoria Gasteiz, Basque Region, Spain - European Green Capital 2012:**

Thank you very much to Cork City for the welcome and to Bernie, Tina and the others for all the work they've done.

You have me here to talk about my city and what it has done over the last years. Please forgive me if my English is not the best, I will try in the next few minutes to show you a city which you have perhaps never heard about and our projects about the environment.

Vitoria Gasteiz is in the north of Spain, is in the Basque Country and is the capital of the Basque Country, and was awarded in 2012 the European Green Capital. It was the third capital to be awarded that prize; the first was Stockholm, the second Hamburg; this year it is Nantes and in 2014 it will be Copenhagen.

The award goes to a city that has a consistent record of achieving high environmental standards and is committed, and this is important, to ongoing and ambitious goals for the future, and acts as a model role to inspire other European cities.

First of all I will give you a snapshot of the city and then I will tell you how our planning began and where we are now after the year 2012.

Vitoria is strategically located in the corridor connecting France with Madrid & Seville. We are near the main trading routes and ports; we are an industrial city. Our capacity has been industrial, especially – two big factories – one is (*unintelligible-Editor*) and the other is Michelin making tyres.

We are the biggest municipality in the Basque Country – 276 square kilometres – and the city and its surroundings has something like a quarter of a million inhabitants. Only 5000 inhabitants live in small villages, really small, sometimes with 100 inhabitants, which are surrounding the city but are in the same municipality. Those small neighbouring villages decided to belong and to be run by the municipality.

We are a city which co-exists in harmony with its environment. I will show you a map of the municipality: we have three spaces: the city itself, the surrounding area of rural, agricultural area, and then close in forested areas, which is one third of the area of the municipality. Our public gardens cover 2000 hectares. Some of our work has involved reclaiming degraded areas. For instance the Salburua Wetlands has been recovered some years ago from the agriculture. At the beginning they were wetlands, but then 20 years ago they were drained for agriculture and we have recovered them again.

So here we have the map of the municipality, in the centre as I said we have the city, we have the buildings and the industrial area, surrounded by agricultural lands and then in green we have the mountains and the forested areas. Because Vitoria is at the crossroads of two biological climates, we have a huge diversity of ecological environments; we have a Mediterranean environment and also Atlantic environments that we want to preserve.

But even the city is very green. We have here some figures: one third of the city surface are public green areas – 45 square metres per inhabitant; we have a surrounding green belt which has 33 kilometres of pedestrian pathways and 90 kilometres of bicycle routes & roads. And this is very important; we talk about proximity and 100% of the population lives less than 300 metres from these spaces. These spaces for us are very important, we see them as health building, social building. There is another point too, we want to give accessibility to people.

So, here is the green belt. The green belt was awarded in 2000 as one of the 100 best projects worldwide at the Third International Competition of Best Practices for Improving the Environment by the United Nations. This area normally in most cities is quite degraded – it has been a (lot of) work to upgrade this area, it was difficult, it required investment and reclaiming. But now we are finishing the connection and you see that it connects four main parks, one is the Salburua Wetlands, that you see on the left, and another two parks in the south. This is the kind of connection we want to make between the urban area to the rural area.

One of the best things (about) the city is that it's quite compact, reasonably compact, with 46 homes per hectare, we lost that when, in the last decade, we built a lot of new neighbourhoods and homes and in the news ones it's 67.5 homes per hectare. But the city has everything (close) at hand and it's very accessible on foot and by bicycle. We are very well organised at urban planning, since the 60s when many people from the rural areas came to the city to work in the main factories.

We think of the environmental heritage as an economic resource. We had many years ago a medieval centre which was founded in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, we also think the landscape is a cultural area.

The city is being progressive. We understand sustainability practically and theoretically has environmental, social and economic (elements), the three of them must work at the same time.

Vitoria is considered to be a city with a high standard of living. It's not a very big city, we don't have the same problems as larger cities; such as traffic problems, poor areas and, even not having those problems, we are working to improve the city.

The city has a lot of experience in the design and installation of social and health policies. We have a network of what we call civic centres, which are facilities in

every neighbourhood with 10,000 inhabitants, with social and sports facilities. In every neighbourhood within the same building you can play whatever sport you want and we have social facilities, we have libraries, and the social associations meet. You have the social facilities for giving social inclusion (they) are there in every neighbourhood, not only in the city centre. We have playgrounds for children, even inside them we have cafés.

And also it's a committed city, which is very important. We have some instruments to promote the participation of our citizens.

For example School Agenda 21: last year 27,000 students, 2,200 teachers, 31 schools participated in Agenda 21. Every year (they) tackle some environmental problem, for example water, another one wind, energy, next one waste management.

Then the Sustainable Mobility Plan first began with a Citizens' Forum; that means that the citizens gathered together and asked our politicians to push the plan, and then they check now what we are doing.

And this involvement is very important because we have achieved some numbers; from year 2006 there has been 26% reduction in water, we have increased by 54% the use of public transport and we have increased the participation in recreational activities from 13,000 in 2006 to 46,000 last year.

So here we have a history, which is very important. Political agreement: in the last years we haven't had a majority, so there's been a concession about the environment and mobility and so on. Promotion; mainly all the departments of the municipality work together for the city on their environment parameters, and it is this participation that has led us to win the Green Capital Award.

Now I'll show you a video that we presented to the European Green Capital Award.

*Watch video*

So this was the campaign which gave us the award. We were competing in the final with, for instance, Barcelona.

But we want to go beyond 2012.

84% of the population of Europe live in cities. Even though the big cities are very important, they are not the majority in Europe. Most citizens live among 100,000 or 200,000 people.

We want to provide a framework of events, initiatives, involving society; these initiatives are important for society, reflecting on the city, and disseminating the green capital. At this event, and others, we are disseminating our values to all the Europe Community and Vitoria as an Ambassador of Europe also we have a lot of (connections) to China due to some agreements. So it's important the environment in the cities. We are not competing for example with Barcelona, Bilbao, for cultural events but we can attract another kind of tourist, for example the environmental tourist.

Beyond the Green Capital Vitoria, as was said in the video, has to look at the consumption of land. We don't want to occupy more land because we think the land is an attraction that gives us food and other values, such as water and air quality.

We think that we have to refurbish, retrofit, the city. Until 2000 we were in a circle of three kilometres that was expanded in the last decade and it gave us some problems – environmental problems. We haven't had any problems with traffic jams or so on. We are talking about mobility and environmental problems, and social question, because we think every citizen has the same opportunity to use their land – all people, disabled people and children, have the same right to use the space so we have to revert the space we have given to housing.

So we have a plan that is focussed on retrofitting and identifying those neighbourhoods which were inhabited by high densities. Here you have retrofitting - in red the buildings that have 50 years or more and for those we have a plan for the municipality to retrofit them. We know that it will be a charge, because we are in a deep economic crisis and it costs money to retrofit them, but we think that our buildings, though they are not municipality owned, are an attraction to the city. So it's good, retrofitting them for the citizens.

Finally I will talk about the Sustainable Mobility Plan that was enforced in 2006 including a tramway and pushing electrical vehicles. These are the figures. I want to show you that the figures are not so bad – that 55% of everyday travels in Vitoria are made on foot, because we have the facilities near but in 2006 that dropped to 49% and we developed a plan to reverse that. Now in 2012 we have seen how the plan is working and we have reverted those figures and increased the bicycle use. The main problem is the traffic, private cars are now only 28% of everyday travels in Vitoria.

We also joined the Covenant of Mayors, and we have a commitment of reduction of greenhouse emissions. And these are the changes from 2006 to 2011 – you will see that in all sectors we have dropped our emissions but we want to be a carbon neutral city by 20, 30, 40 years and the commitment has been very strong. You see that first column is energy consumption in every sector and you see in red in the second column is the objective to become carbon neutral, to reduce by 82% in construction but for example 45% in buildings and so on.

Finally I would like to talk about governance, and what we think about governance. I will read this because I think this is quite important.

In order to be able to implement the aspiring principles of the new harmonies good governance is more necessary than ever before in order to bring us gradually closer to a more sustainable pattern of development.

In fact, the institutionalisation patterns of production and consumption represent in many cases the cause of the problems at economic, social and environmental level, as a government developed model is not questioned.

Vitoria Gasteiz understands that this new governance by sustainability must also involve the commitment of cities and the latter must promote new initiatives and process scenarios with a higher level of commitment at a local level.

An essential question is, in order to achieve this, to maintain the political consensus and to now form administrative practices in line with this thesis as guaranteeing the continuity of sustainable city policies, and how to maintain this successfully.

That means that the mayor gives importance to opposition parties when one goal is achieved; that's not only an agreement to support one project but when it's achieved we are glad that it works.

In order to ensure better governance the aim is to strengthen the co-ordination between the environmental sector and the various different municipal departments and organisations.

I belong to the Environment Department, I am the Energy Manager of the municipality, but we have to work with every department because the municipality gives services, and they can give essential services in the most friendly way.

The aim is to improve the model by strong institutional leadership sharing with the different agents that make the city, not only inside the municipality but also the social networks and associations, in order to respond to the needs of a city such as Vitoria Gasteiz which aims to move forward in a manner according to the principles of sustainability.

Thank you very much.