



Sootfree Cities – update of city ranking on air quality activities in 23 European cities

Background

Embargo: March 31st, noon.

The new ranking of air quality measures of Friends of the Earth Germany and the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) has been published on March 31st.¹ The Sootfree Cities Ranking evaluates the air quality activities of 23 European Cities in 16 countries with regard to air pollution **from transport**. Have they been able to reduce the concentrations of PM10 (Fine Dust) and NO₂ (nitrogenic oxide) by adequate measures to abide by the EU standards or will these activities lead to compliance? Do they use the full range of technical and economic tools as well as sustainable transport planning to clean the air and make their cities more liveable? The ranking update evaluates the same nine categories which were taken in the 2011 ranking: reduction success, technical reduction measures - such as low emission zones or driving bans, clean public busses and vehicle fleets, filters for construction machinery, use of economic incentives and promotion of sustainable transport i.e. mobility management, public transport as well as cycling and walking and thus reducing cars in the cities. Last but not least transparency and participation was another category under examination.

The ranking provides for an overview of some of the most interesting measures that city's implement to reduce local air pollution, paired with local insight from the local NGOs. In the ranking, cities were asked to supply information via a questionnaire. This information was cross-checked with air quality plans and other sources and ultimately local NGOs supplied first-hand information on the local situation and the effectiveness of the activities.

Overview: Progress in all cities – due to EU clean air policy

The result of the ranking shows considerable progress in abating air pollution of PM10 particles so dangerous to human health. Compared to the last ranking four years ago we see substantial improvements in clean air policies of the cities.

The levels of air pollution were quite different. Some cities were in compliance with limit values but still active in further improving AQ (such as Copenhagen). Other cities were rather inactive, also because they were – due to favourable geographic conditions, in compliance with EU limit values (such as Dublin). Some cities have already been able to actively reduce PM10 enough to stick to the EU limit values and some will comply within the next two years by implementing the measures they have adopted. This is even true for Stuttgart coming down from an extremely high level of exceedance (more than 100 exceedances of daily limit values) and being geographically situated in a basin with a very low level of air exchange.

These very conspicuous advancements of clean air measures, observable in all cities, have been triggered by the EU Air Quality Directive. Never before have so many interesting steps toward environmentally friendly mobility been undertaken. And they bring about many collateral benefits, making these cities more attractive.

¹ www.sootfreecities.eu (the results of the new ranking are visible from March 31st, noon. The last ranking was carried through in 2011).

Less gratifying are the results of NO₂ reduction. Here the limit values are widely breached. Only some cities like Zurich managed to reduce concentrations and reached compliance with EU standards². This is clearly due to the fact, that the cities don't have an effective toolkit at their disposal. It is in theory local responsibility to come up with action plans to solve the problem. At the same there, this ranking acknowledges a broad variety of circumstances in which municipalities deal with this issue. Economic situations and budgetary constraints play an important role – this can be seen in Spain where public transport programmes are cut back, as do political and civil awareness of the issue, which are vital to acceptance of plans.

EU must go ahead: more action is needed to help municipalities

Cities and regions must not be left alone in their efforts to reduce air pollution by EU policies. Cities like Vienna and Berlin, Graz and Stuttgart with a high background concentration need activities on the EU and the national level to reduce high background concentrations and transnational entries. These background concentrations can be effectively targeted by an ambitious revision of the NEC-Directive.

Furthermore, emission from construction machines can be diminished by an ambitious Non Road Mobile Machinery Directive demanding filters for the construction machines – as it is the case in Switzerland already.

Last not least EU has to insure that real emissions of NO_x of the cars correspond with the specifications of their Euro 6 standard.

SHORT STORIES:

THE BEST:

Zurich:

Most interesting is that air quality policy is part of a large and coherent sustainable urban planning effort in Zurich. The planning includes a consistent policy away from private motorised transport and promoting sustainable transport, as part of a 'car-free living' objective. All vehicles are as far as possible subject to tight requirements to reduce their emissions. For example, both construction machinery and the municipal fleet are obliged to be retrofitted with particulate filters. As a result of these policies Zurich does in theory comply with EU limit values. Nevertheless is comprehensive and holistic sustainable policies are an interesting example of urban planning and air quality measures.

Copenhagen:

Copenhagen has air pollution levels that comply with EU limit values, although for NO₂ only by a small margin. These levels are a result of consistent policies targeting pollution sources and lowering concentrations. Sustainable transport is promoted, with public transport being extended by a completely new metro line and also using very high frequency bus connections. The city also promotes cycling and walking, including an ambitious target for 2015 to have a modal split of 50% for cycling in morning commuting in the inner city, an increase by 15% compared to 2011. But the city has also created specific measures to address motorised emission sources: Since 2010 every vehicle above 3.5 tonnes needs to comply at least with EURO 4 standards. Copenhagen is interested in tightening this scheme but for this national regulation is needed. It has high standards for its municipal vehicles and also sets specific requirements for non-road machinery. Within the city, machines need to be equipped with particulate filters. Finally, the city is very transparent and committed to implementing progressive and effective air quality policies and involves stakeholders into dialogues and planning processes.

² Zurich as city in Switzerland does not have to meet EU standards

Vienna:

The city of Vienna is progressive in its air quality policies and has positive measures to promote public transport and cycling. In particular the investments in public transport, in connection with an extension of the parking management and an annual ticket at a comparatively very low price of 365€ are comprehensive policies implemented in parallel and that all contribute to the city's policies, such as increasing the modal split share from 6% to 20% between 2013 and 2020, with a motorised traffic target of a 7% reduction. To reach this, the city even implements initially controversial measures such as the conversion of Mariahilfer street into a pedestrian and shared space zone, examples of attractive new urban areas of a liveable city.

THE WORST:**Luxembourg:**

The city of Luxembourg is a highly car centric city with a staggeringly high share of 72.5% car or motorcycle use in 2009. Recognizing there has to be a change, the city strives for increasing walking and cycling by 12% (up from 13%) and public transport by 4.5% (up from 14.5%) in 2020. Still, 56% remain for car and motorcycle use, given that the city accomplishes this target. Currently planned measures were not convincing in that aspect, especially compared to the ever growing motorisation in the city. Between 2010 and 2014 the number of passenger cars in Luxembourg grew by 9.5%.

Measures to promote public transport were positive, the city's municipal fleet strategy was comprehensive and cycling and walking measures also were implemented. However, given the high share of transport, the city could and should do more. Measures such as LEZs were not taken so far. Neither was the idea of a congestion charging zones, the latter even recommended by the OECD.

Lisbon:

Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, has high pollution levels consistently above EU limit values, although with decreasing tendencies. The city has introduced a Low Emission Zone which before 2014 was very lax in requirements and there was virtually no enforcement. In 2014 the zone was tightened to Euro 3 in the central LEZ zone and Euro 2 in the wider LEZ zone. Also enforcement was improved. The city recently has expanded its parking management and raised prices between 2010 and 2012. And there are measures to improve and promote cycling and public transport. Overall, however the city has few information and few dedicated air quality measures in place, compared with a high share of individual transport, very low cycling. Ambitious measures to improve certain air pollution sources were scarce. One example is the still very high share of older vehicles in the city's municipal and bus fleet, 73.1% for busses and 68% for municipal vehicles below EURO 4.

Rome:

Rome has PM10 and NO2 levels which are usually in breach of the EU limit values, and official estimates indicate that local transport contributes around 85% of air pollution in the city. This is easy to understand, given the fact that sustainable transport overall only accounts for 1/3rd for all journeys. The city has implemented several measures, such as the so-called "Zona Traffico Limitato". However, these measures were often not sufficiently implemented in reality. The public transport system is in a bad state, the cycling infrastructure is still not sufficient for cycling to grow significantly. At least the city has set targets for cycling in the future, it wants to increase cycling until 2019, from 0.3% to 2%.