

Muenster competes for the title "European Green Capital"

Speech of Dr. Berthold Tillmann in front of the experts commission in Brussels on 13th January 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, let me thank you for your invitation and for the opportunity to introduce to you our wonderful home town, Münster.

My name is Berthold Tillmann. My dedicated team of local experts and myself, as Lord Mayor of Münster, have come here today to defend our case for Münster as the European Green Capital.

Not an easy case at all, as we all know. I mean, WOW!, look at our seven friendly competitors: There are national capitals among them, large cities with a very high profile. And then look at us. - Münster.

Chances are, you never even heard about Münster before you received our application - although, as we like to point out in any European context, Europe just wouldn't be the same today without the Westphalian Peace Treaty of 1648: It ended thirty years of war and was signed in Münster.

Famous or not, the fact that we are here today speaks for itself: The information that we have compiled for you must have been convincing.

Our aim here today is to make all these facts and figures come to life.

Above all, ladies and gentlemen,
we would like to give you some emotional insight into who we really are – we, the citizens of Münster -- and what makes us tick. We also want to explain why we think Münster, home to people with 160 different nationalities, has a lot to share with other cities in Europe, and what our visions are for 2010 or 2011, should we be awarded the prestigious title of “European Green Capital”.

One of the things I like about European contests is the fact that they force you, to detach yourself from your city, and try and get an outside view.

Funny enough, there are still surprises. Like when we first got together to think about the question, “What is it about Münster that we would call “green”? -- We ended up having to rephrase this question and ask ourselves, “Is there actually *anything* about Münster that is *not* “green”? Let me show you what I mean.

This is a bird-eye picture of Münster. As you can see, our city is embedded in the lovely green landscape of the “Münsterland”.

When we get closer and focus on a plan of the city, we can see that again, the dominant colour is – green.

The following picture illustrates very well what we call Münsters “Green space ordinance”, a guiding plan for all our green spaces and the basis for our official land use plan. It dates back to 1965: Münster was one of the first cities in Germany to establish that kind of plan.

First of all, you can see our beloved “Promenade”, which looks like a green belt around the old city centre – or, as we see it, the “*green heart*” of Münster. Around it, there is a second green belt encompassing the space between the city centre and the outskirts, and a third one reaching out to the borders of our city.

These three rings of greenery are connected by seven green corridors, consisting of parks, fluvial plains and green spaces that will never be opened up for housing projects. As you can imagine, they work very well as a ventilation system for the city centre -- green arteries, providing for our green heart.

Münster is indeed “green at heart” _ in more than one sense:

An active interest in sustainable development is what characterises our people, and therefore, our city. The same holds true for our local politics. First and foremost, it is the principle of climate protection that defines our urban planning, which is why we spent 99 million Euros to build a combined gas and steam plant, and invested 50 million Euros for the renovation and insulation of older buildings, and initiated all the other activities detailed in our application.

But let me assure you that, independent of party programmes, there is absolutely no topic in Münster’s every-day political life that does not have a “green” dimension, from our decisions concerning the economic development of our city to the education of our children, to name but a few.

Of course, anybody could claim this, but in Münster, as we will show you in a minute, we do go to some extreme to prove this. Beforehand, let us present to you a little video about our city: Welcome to Münster!

- Film -

Voilà, ladies and gentlemen – this was a first impression of our city – an impression of the quality of life we enjoy every day.

There might be a slight risk in these pictures, though: You might get a rather misty-eyed impression of Münster: It looks so peaceful and quiet – and privileged in some ways.

So why do we think that, as a European Green Capital, we could serve as a role model to other cities with “real problems”?

I would like to present to you, three good reasons:

- Firstly, our tradition of taking conscious and strategic decisions for Münster’s future;
- secondly, the model size of our city, and,
- finally, the strong involvement of our people.

Let's get straight to the first point.

The quality of life that we enjoy today has *nothing* to do with sheer luck or the natural course of things. On the contrary: It has *everything* to do with a series of conscious decisions. To quote a very wise man, most of you might have come across at some point, Professor Albus Dumbledore, late Headmaster of Hogwarts’ School of Witchcraft and Wizardry:

“It is our *choices* that show what we truly are [...], far more than our abilities.” (II, 245).

We owe a lot to the generations before us: Our city would look quite different today had *they* not set us off in the right direction.

When German cities demolished their medieval city walls because they were growing fast, in most cases, that space was quickly taken over by streets and houses. Not so in Münster. Our forefathers decided to create a green ring around the city centre, and they planted the trees that still form our promenade.

Another example: In the 1960s and 70s, the idea of unrestrained mobility was very prominent in Germany. On the level of urban development, this meant that cities aimed at being “driver-friendly”. Naturally, Münster also had to deal with the exploding number of cars, but even then, Münster invested in its public transport system and in the creation of a network of bike paths.

These decisions seem very logical today, but at the time, there were a lot of people who looked down at Münster and its lack of modern thinking. Luckily, Westphalians can be quite stubborn. We still are when it comes to environmental matters.

Many cities in Europe have a *different* starting point, of course, but we would like to encourage them to found their own tradition, based on the tried and tested combination of common sense, sustainable development and visionary thinking.

We, too, need to earn our daily bread!

But, from our experience, we can say that, even within the strict framework of economic and political necessities, we have always been able to create choices and set priorities:

By means of our “Integrated Urban Development and City Marketing Concept”, we have established a very strategic approach to shaping the future of our city, integrating all our stakeholders in our planning processes:

Although the process was actually quite long and sometimes rather painful, the results justify all our efforts, and our strategy pays off well:

- Münster is a city of learning with 50 thousand students enrolled in eight colleges, and it has become a leading force, in the field of nano technology.
- Münster’s attractiveness for businesses was confirmed, recently, by a ranking published in one of our leading business magazines: Out of all German cities, Münster was the “second most attractive one” – surpassed only by Munich.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me tell you the second reason why we think Münster has the potential to serve as an example – a very practical reason this time. It has to do with the *size* of our city.

The majority of bigger European cities is similar in size to Münster – and thus has to meet similar challenges.

As proud as we are of our city, we know very well that you could call Münster – well, actually -- yes: a bit provincial!

But, let’s face it: “provincial” is a label, that you could put on most areas of Europe!

It is true that almost 80 % of the European population live in an urban environment. However, it is also true that there are actually only very few really *big* cities.

The majority is like us: middle-sized, but of vital importance for a rather big region.

Münster's closest sphere of influence includes the 420 thousand people living in and around the city; and as the traditional heart of Westphalia, we serve as a point of reference for as many as 8 million people.

Münster is a typical, almost model European city. Münster is very modern – and yet, it has always grown slowly, organically. We *do* have a close eye on land use: Münster does not creep into its surroundings: It is a big city, but very compact and green – much to the benefit of our people.

Ladies and Gentlemen: The people --

our main concern, our biggest asset and our third reason when we come back to Münster's potential as a role model. Because, frankly, our people are incredible!

When I declare that Münster is "green at heart", I could also say that a green heart pulses in every one of Münsters two hundred and eighty thousand citizens. Let me give you an example:

In January 2007, hurricane "Kyrill" felled tens of thousands of old and precious trees. Much to our distress, one thing was clear: It would take years to undo all the damage with the little money we could spare in the city's budget.

However, within days after the hurricane, some of our citizens got together to raise money and buy trees! Everybody was invited to sponsor a tree, and a lot of people seized the opportunity to plant a family tree in front of the castle.

For this stretch of our promenade alone, our citizens provided two hundred and twenty thousand Euros out of their own personal pockets! Amazing, isn't it?

But this is the Münster spirit, ladies and gentlemen!

This is the kind of involvement we can count on within our city, not only when it comes to European competitions like the "Entente Florale", but also in our ongoing campaigns for a green, healthy and friendly urban environment in Münster:

Both our local economy and our citizens have raised a lot of money through sponsorships, helping to create and realise projects all over town – projects which otherwise just wouldn't be possible.

We are “green at heart” – which is also why we use our bikes so much. According to our traffic survey of 2007, almost fifty per cent of our citizens use their bikes for distances up to five kilometres.

This is exceptional, and certainly cannot be attributed to any lack of alternatives – if there is no car, there is always the bus. It can’t be down to our climate either, as it does rain or snow in Münster. Nor are we “green fundamentalists”:

We are actually quite down to earth and function just like anybody else.

So, to reach our aims, we just made our city as comfortable as possible for cyclists, introducing a large number of traffic solutions which put cyclists first, and building the largest underground bike park in Germany, accommodating more than three thousand bikes.

Naturally, the kind of environmental conscience you find in Münster does not just develop out of thin air: It is deeply engrained in our education:

At a very early age, we start teaching our children to enjoy– and respect! – nature.

We believe that children are the most important opinion makers of all, which is why we put so much emphasis on their education and their welfare – an approach which has been universally recognised:

Münster was awarded the title of “most child-friendly city in Germany”, and Germany’s best primary school was just found – in Münster.

All of this, ladies and gentlemen, does *not* mean that Münster is a city without problems, however:

We continue to work hard on reducing Münster’s levels of pollution. As successful as we have been in terms of cutting down our emission of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, we are still worried about nitrogen dioxide and about noise levels.

We know we need to reduce even further the number of commuters using private cars, and we are presently discussing how to prepare for the imminent demographic change, which will affect Münster just like most other European cities.

And the list continues.

We are very eager to know more about how other cities across Europe tackle these problems. This is one of the reasons why we look forward so much to the opportunity of exchanging best practice examples in the years to come.

Moreover, we are highly motivated to help turn the European "Thematic Strategy" into reality, no matter which city is awarded the title of "Green Capital".

Should WE be awarded one of the titles, however, we plan to turn "our" year into a big event for all of Europe: We have given you an outline in our application, ranging from a big kick-off event to the "Green Dream Camp", from international workshops and the university summer school to guided tours and exhibitions, inviting and involving Europeans of all ages and nationalities.

Thus, we will turn into action the great ideas behind the concept of the "Green Capital", kindling the "green spirit" all over Europe. We hope that there will be time, in the course of our discussion, to go into some detail there.

We can actually be quite inventive and creative without giving up on our German desire to be well organised!

As a result, we regularly make our international guests want to "try a little German-ness", a little "Münster-ness", back home! This is the kind of feed-back we have received following the 2004 award as "Most Livable Community Worldwide" or our "International Sculpture Projects".

To wrap things up, ladies and gentlemen,
let me assure you that we did not enter this competition lightly, but light-heartedly.

From the awards we've won before, we know that there is always a big effort behind these titles, both in terms of financial commitment and in terms of public relations.

But we also know that we can rely on our citizens to back up our efforts, and to take a very active part in it. This has given us the courage to aim higher than ever before, and serve as an ecological role model within Europe:

We support, with all our heart, the sustainable ideas which constitute the core of the "Green Capital Award". We would be deeply honoured if we were granted the opportunity to promote these ideas further, and contribute to a healthier future for all of us.

So let me finish by inviting you and all of Europe to the "Green Capital" of our hearts – Münster!

Thank you very much.