

Information Service of the City of Heidelberg

Heidelberg: A model of environment and climate protection

Over several decades, Heidelberg has earned itself a reputation as an environmental and sustainability capital with a large network of partners. As early as 1992, Heidelberg became the first major German city to adopt a municipal climate protection program. Heidelberg has twice received the European Sustainable City Award. Heidelberg also received the Global Green City Award in 2015. This award recognizes the exemplary commitment of cities worldwide to sustainable development. Finally, Heidelberg's exemplary dedication to city forest management received recognition from the PEFC with the award of the title "Forest Capital 2018". Since 2019, the municipal environmental education platform "Naturally Heidelberg" has been an official project of the "United Nations Decade on Biodiversity".

The City of Heidelberg is committed to climate protection in all areas. This includes waste avoidance by switching to multi-use coffee cups, energy saving in buildings, conversion of the district heating supply system to renewable energy sources, and innovative mobility solutions. For example, to encourage the purchase of automobiles with alternative drive systems, grants worth up to 10,000 euros are available, depending on the vehicle type.

The central objective remains: Heidelberg aims to become a climate-neutral municipality – with the participation of all members of civic society – by 2050. In May 2019, the Lord Mayor of Heidelberg declared a climate crisis in order to adopt an even more ambitious approach. This was based on the conviction that cities have a key role to play in combating climate change. Heidelberg has already recorded tangible success with measures and projects in the Master Plan for 100% Climate Protection: CO₂ emissions have fallen by 13 percent since 1987 despite the fact that the population has grown by 25 percent.

International Climate Conference in Heidelberg, May 2019

On May 22/23, 2019, Heidelberg hosted an international conference on climate protection. The organizers of the International Conference on Climate Action (ICCA2019) were the Federal Environment Ministry, the State of Baden-Württemberg and the City of Heidelberg. The central question of ICCA2019 was: What kind of functioning cooperation is required between the different political levels in order to deliver ambitious climate protection on a broad basis?

Bahnstadt: one of the world's largest passive house developments

Bahnstadt is a climate protection project initiated by the City of Heidelberg with world-class reference model status. The passive house architectural concept is standard throughout the entire district. Buildings are supplied with district heating from 100% renewable energy. A multi-use district is taking shape on the site, with space for residential, scientific and commercial activities. The district will eventually be home to around 6,800 people and provide up to 6,000 jobs, predominantly in research and science-based companies. There are already around 4,300 people living in Bahnstadt. Bahnstadt was voted Passive House Region of the Year at the international "Passive House Award 2014" competition. In July 2019, the project celebrated its tenth anniversary, and its dynamic growth continues unabated.

Climate-friendly mobility

Heidelberg is committed to ensuring everyone can get about the city using environment-friendly means. Mannheim, Heidelberg and Ludwigshafen have pooled various projects designed in the short term to bring about a tangible reduction in nitrogen dioxide levels and an improvement in air quality through the Master Plan for Sustainable Mobility. It focuses on five areas: Digitalization of transport, networking of local public transport, cycling, electrification of transport, and urban logistics. The new electric bus route in the city center has been a key component of the master plan since January 2019.

The Heidelberg mobility network will comprehensively modernize and expand the city's tram network in the years ahead. The mobility network pools several sub-projects into a single large package of measures. Its objective is to win more than 10,000 additional passengers per day, over 7,000 of them people switching from the automobile to public transport. Buses on the remaining urban routes will be converted to fuel cell drive within the next few years.

The quickest way to get around Heidelberg, however, is by bicycle. It is therefore no coincidence that the city's inhabitants make 26 percent of all their journeys by bicycle. This makes Heidelberg the frontrunner in Baden-Württemberg. For this reason, the city is working closely with state and regional partners on ambitious plans to develop both inner-city cycle paths and express cycle routes to surrounding municipalities. A main cycle axis will be built in the west of the city over the next few years. Two major bridges for pedestrians and cycles will link both the express cycle routes from Mannheim and Schwetzingen and the main station with the university campus and the Neuenheimer Feld hospital site.

Master Plan for 100% Climate Protection: climate-neutral municipality by 2050

As one of 19 model municipalities, Heidelberg was part of the German Environment Ministry's support program "Master Plan for 100% Climate Protection" from 2012 to 2018. The goal here is to become a climate-neutral municipality: By 2050, Heidelberg is committed to reducing CO₂ emissions by 95% and cutting energy requirements by a half. Implementation of this in practice will involve the urban community as a whole. Seven areas of action were identified as offering major savings potential: Construction and renovation, transport and mobility, energy supply, energy-efficient products, climate-neutral university, training for climate protection, climate-friendly consumption, and food. Through its participation in the support program, the city was continuing its successful 2007 "Climate Needs Protection!" campaign, which became a model for the European climate protection campaign "Engage".

Sustainable business practices

The city is helping small and medium-size enterprises to develop an environmental management system through the Sustainable Business Practices project. This aims to optimize operational procedures, cut energy costs and save money. 133 businesses with a workforce totaling almost 9,000 employees have been involved since 2001. The most recent data collected for the first ten project phases showed annual CO₂ savings of almost 2,000 tonnes. This is equivalent in volume to the CO₂ resulting from electricity consumed by over 700 four-person households. Total operating costs were reduced by around one million euros per year. The Environment Ministry of the State of Baden-Württemberg adopted the Heidelberg concept and has offered it throughout Baden-Württemberg under the name "ECOfit" since 2005.

Low energy consumption for municipal buildings

The city itself is setting a good example under the slogan "Think globally – act locally". Thanks to energy-efficient building and renovation work, it has successfully reduced energy consumption in municipal buildings to date by one half. This approach protects the climate and saves around 1.2 million euros annually (compared with 1993). 100% of municipal real estate is supplied with energy from renewable sources.

Promoting participation in climate and environment protection

The City of Heidelberg encourages active participation in climate and environment protection. Home owners receive incentives for energy-saving construction and renovation through the Efficient Energy Use support program. The Environment-Friendly Mobility support program provides subsidies of up to EUR 1,000 for the purchase of natural gas, electric and hybrid vehicles. Heidelberg is the only municipality in Germany to have been rewarding buyers of hydrogen vehicles with a subsidy of up to EUR 10,000 since December 2018. And, since January 2016, any resident of Heidelberg who voluntarily comes off the register of car owners is rewarded by the city with a one-off annual public transport pass valid for Rhein-Neckar Verkehr GmbH and Verkehrsverbund Rhein-Neckar GmbH.

Using the solar panel register, the city in collaboration with Stadtwerke Heidelberg, energy consultants and Sparkasse Heidelberg facilitates planning of photovoltaic systems.

Heidelberg supports the conservation of biodiversity, in particular through the nationwide alliance “Municipalities for Biodiversity”. The city works closely with associations, clubs and other institutions on conservation issues.

Stadtwerke Heidelberg: Energy concept

Since 2011, Stadtwerke Heidelberg, a municipal utility company, has been implementing its “Energy Concept 2020” – a program for the energy transition process, with which it makes a significant contribution to the “Master Plan for 100% Climate Protection”. The utility company is gradually expanding its own energy generation to between 30% and 40%, and in so doing is investing in highly efficient heat-power cogeneration, renewable energies and natural gas. In recent years the company has developed a wood-fueled combined heat and power plant (CHP) and several biomethane and natural gas cogeneration plants. As a result, the share of renewable energy generated for public heating has increased from zero to around 20%. In terms of heat generation, the company now produces around 25% itself.

District heating is the mainstay of efforts in Heidelberg to increase climate protection. On the one hand, it provides almost 50% of all households in Heidelberg with 20% renewable energies and therefore contributes to the heating transition process – one of the greatest challenges of the energy transition process. And on the other, it enables the best possible use of energy from the new and highly efficient CHP plants, since use is made not only of the energy but also of the heat generated. In addition, by 2020 a heat storage facility is to be built at the “Energy Park” in Pfaffengrund, which will add greater flexibility to the energy system. Stadtwerke Heidelberg is already looking at other options to generate even more heat and power from renewable sources and waste heat in the years ahead – both for Heidelberg itself and the Rhine-Neckar metropolitan region beyond.

“Forest Capital 2018”

In 2018, the PEFC recognized Heidelberg’s exemplary dedication to city forest management by awarding it the title “Forest Capital”. PEFC is the world’s leading forest conservation organization – timber and paper products bearing the PEFC label originate from environmentally, economically and socially sustainable forest management. The City of Heidelberg has been exemplary in the way it has managed the city forest for many years in line with environmental, social and economic criteria. Around 40% of Heidelberg’s municipal surface area is forested; around three quarters of these forests are owned by the City of Heidelberg. Heidelberg is also one of only nine cities across Germany which, in addition to having their sustainable forest management certified, also comply with the recreational forest standard of PEFC Germany.

Training for sustainable development (BNE)

In recent years the City of Heidelberg has succeeded in establishing permanent structures for its many successful BNE projects. For example, daycare facilities in Heidelberg already provide children in the city with fun approaches to the topics of energy, the environment and fair trade. This knowledge is given greater depth and breadth in schools. Children and young people are encouraged to recognize and put into practice their own potential for action. "Training for sustainable development" has also become a primary focus for afternoon and holiday care facilities organized by the "päd-aktiv" association.

The City of Heidelberg offers teachers regular in-service training on the topic and continues to implement successful training projects such as the "E-Team Project" and mobility projects in schools, and the environmental education program "Naturally Heidelberg", which has over one hundred events and around 10,000 participants per year. UNESCO has recognized the municipality of Heidelberg on multiple occasions for its commitment to "Training for sustainable development". From 2019, the municipal environmental education platform "Naturally Heidelberg" has been able to label itself an "outstanding project in the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity".

International commitment

Heidelberg is actively committed to greater climate protection and nature conservation both nationally and internationally. The city has extremely good links with many others around the globe, not least as an Innovator City in the international C40 Cities network, as well as through the Climate Alliance, the Energy Cities network and the German Association of Towns and Cities. Lord Mayor Prof. Dr. Eckart Würzner has been President of the Energy Cities network since 2006 and a board member of the international Covenant of Mayors city network. The Covenant of Mayors is the greatest voluntary commitment by cities to climate protection. It represents a total of more than 800 million people from over 9,000 cities and municipalities on six continents and in 132 countries. The City of Heidelberg further contributes through its support and promotion of "One World" projects, which focus on sustainable development as defined by the Sustainable Development Goals.

Organic, regionally sourced and fairly traded products

Numerous campaigns under the slogan "bio.regional.fair" are intended to win over citizens to the idea of consuming regionally sourced, organic and fairly traded produce. The city supports retailers, the catering trade, cafeteria operators and other institutions in switching to sustainable products. The focus in 2017 and 2018 was on marketing regionally sourced products. The association Transfair e. V. conferred upon Heidelberg a leading role in its commitment to fair trade and named it a "Fair Trade Town" for a third time. For its own goods purchasing, the city gives preference to fair trade products and goods that are regionally sourced and, where possible, organic.

Since the summer of 2017, Heidelberg's #andersbechern campaign has been drawing people's attention to alternatives to single-use cups for drinks to go.

Further information on environment and climate protection activities and projects relating to sustainability can be found on our website at www.heidelberg.de/umwelt