

## Making Allies for Greener Cities

~ Europe's Largest Event for Sustainable Cities has Launched its Final Programme ~



*Maria Vassilakou, Vice Mayor & Vice Governor, City of Vienna and Hanna E. Marcussen, Vice Mayor of Urban Development, City of Oslo.*

**Oslo, February 28 – CityChangers all over the world are leading the change to make cities greener and more liveable. At the URBAN FUTURE Global Conference (#UFGC19) in Oslo this May – among 200+ other speakers – you will meet two Vice Mayors, one from Austria, the other from Norway, who have taken up the fight against cars in the city centre.**

Today the final programme for UFGC19 was released at DOGA in Oslo giving the audience a first sneak peak of cool speakers live on stage. Around 400 people attended in order to get a feeling of what to expect when the URBAN FUTURE global conference will kick off on May 22. Until May 24 around 85 sessions, more than 20 Field Trips and a whole range of side events will turn it into one of the signature events of the European Green Capital.

### **From Vienna to Oslo – making our cities more liveable**

When Maria Vassilakou, Vienna's first green Vice Mayor, took office in 2012, it was with the ambition that "Residents of Vienna should no longer have to rely on their own cars." Her mission was clear: more, and more affordable, public transportation.



In seven years, the city has seen a one hundred percent increase in passengers traveling with public transport. In addition, Vienna now has one of the most affordable pricing policies for public transportation among all European cities. Her mission has made her both popular and controversial in the Austrian capital.

“We have to ask ourselves a simple question: Is the city a good place for children? Because a city that is good for children is good for everyone, whether young or old. Children need pretty much the same things that everyone needs for a good life: open urban space, recreation areas, they need to relate to nature and find a secure environment. So, it’s time to rethink our streets as they have huge potential!” notes Vassilakou and continues:

“Since cars most likely still play and will continue to play a role in people’s lives for at least the next one or two decades, our approach is not to ban cars completely from streets but rather to make alternatives much more attractive. This means a redefinition and transformation of streets into shared spaces that calm traffic, reducing the fares of the annual public transport ticket, expansion of public transport and of short-term parking to outer districts, investments in cycling infrastructure and more.”

### **“Giving the streets back to the people”**

Vice Mayor Vassilakou's experiences are familiar to Oslo Vice Mayor of Urban Development Hanna E. Marcussen. Marcussen has been a vocal advocate for restricting the use of motorized vehicles in the capital's city centre.

As Vice Mayor she has, among other things, been instrumental in removing more than 750 parking spaces – freeing up space for bicyclists and pedestrians. Naturally, initiatives like this has also led to some critique.

Despite all this adversity, Hanna Marcussen's outlook for the future is positive. And the number of people supporting these initiatives is growing fast and steadily.

- Cities, like Oslo, have been built for cars for several decades, and it’s about time we change it! I think it is important that we all think about what kind of cities we want to live in. I am certain that when people imagine their ideal city it would not be a dream of polluted air, cars jammed in endless traffic or streets filled up with parked cars. So, this is exactly what we are trying to do in Oslo. We are building a city like most people want it: more green spaces, more benches, more pedestrian streets. Better bike lanes and better public transport, clean air and a friendly and safe environment, says Marcussen.

### **Berlin’s most famous Bicycle activist**

During the conference in May more than 200 CityChangers from Norway and abroad will be on stage to inspire others with their ideas for sustainable urban development and stories of better cities.



Germany's most famous cycling activist *Heinrich Strößenreuther* is one of them. Strößenreuther is the man behind "the bicycle law" in Berlin, securing the city 1600 km of new bicycle lanes on main roads and 100 km with its own "Autobahn" for bicycle commuters.

### **Climate-friendly burial grounds**

When creating a vision of a future city, we have to think about more than "just" emissions in connection to transport. Urban Future is about the whole city. Many cities are about to lose biodiversity - which affects parks and outdoor areas.

*Magnus Nielsen* is a gardener at one of Oslo's largest burial grounds, and the primary engine behind the climate initiative on several such grounds in Oslo. Due to his constant commitment, a wide range of measures is being implemented, including the electrification of gardening tools and the replacement of pesticides with steam and flowers that attract bees.

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### **On the URBAN FUTURE Global Conference**

The UFGC is the world's largest meeting place for CityChangers, people who strive to make their cities more sustainable with lots of passion and commitment. They implement tangible projects, thus improving life in the respective city. The UFGC brings together our brightest minds and regards itself as a neutral platform without any political agenda. The conference was founded in 2014 by Gerald Babel-Sutter and is taking place in a different European city every year from 2018 forward. Since 2014, visitor numbers have tripled.

The conference has more than 100 partners, among them Airbus, Sweco, EY and Daimler. FutureBuilt is co-host of the 2019 event taking place in Oslo from May 22 – 24, 2019.

For more information, please visit [www.urban-future.org](http://www.urban-future.org).

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