



# Hamburg – home of the Green Network

1. Hamburg's ambitious green roof strategy showing the potential to transform the city's roofscape ('Ministry of Environment & Energy, Hamburg').  
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2. The 'GrünesNetzHamburg' symbol showing the rings, the axes and the parks.  
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Hamburg's Green Network is not only one hundred years old this year but its adaptability enables it to embrace the city's expansion

**T**he 'Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg' is a place dominated by water, defining its history, its culture and its character. At the heart of the City is the Alster: an interlinked pair of lakes surrounded by grand buildings, handsome promenades and beautiful leafy villas, every bit as striking as Geneva's. Lesser known however, is the fact that half the metropolitan area is green space, which extends way out from the Alster to the landscapes beyond the City's boundaries, giving its residents an invaluable means of connecting to nature and conversely, a means by which Nature can return the favour. So how did this happy situation come about?

This year marks the City's 100th year of planning for what is now called its 'GrünesNetzHamburg' (Green Network); the first plan being the 'Axial Concept' from 1919 which established the idea of green corridors radiating out from the city centre, with interaxial spaces providing parks, allotments and sports grounds, the main aim of which was to 'connect city dwellers with the countryside'. In the 1920s this enlightened idea was supplemented with parks like the 'Stadtspark' with its lakes, woods and gardens to serve the growing population. However, WWII wreaked huge damage on Hamburg with much of the city either destroyed or severely affected. Nevertheless, as part of its recovery, Hamburg's 1947 'Reconstruction Plan' adopted the same principles as before, and thus

green space helped guide its urban renewal. This continued through two more iterations until in 1973, when the axes were extended and also supplemented by two 'Green Rings' circling the city. The first was along the line of the historic fortifications and the second about 8km from the centre, to start connecting the disparate green spaces. These bolder moves were more overtly ecological (in keeping with the times), with habitat creation and wildlife enhancement now more to the fore, recognizing that human beings were not the only end-user of the City's spaces. Further plans in the 20th century supplemented this framework, so that the present-day 'GrünesNetzHamburg' is strikingly evident, physically accessible and impressive.



**FEATURE**

**3. The 1920's 'Stadtspark' with its view over the central lake to the Planetarium'.**  
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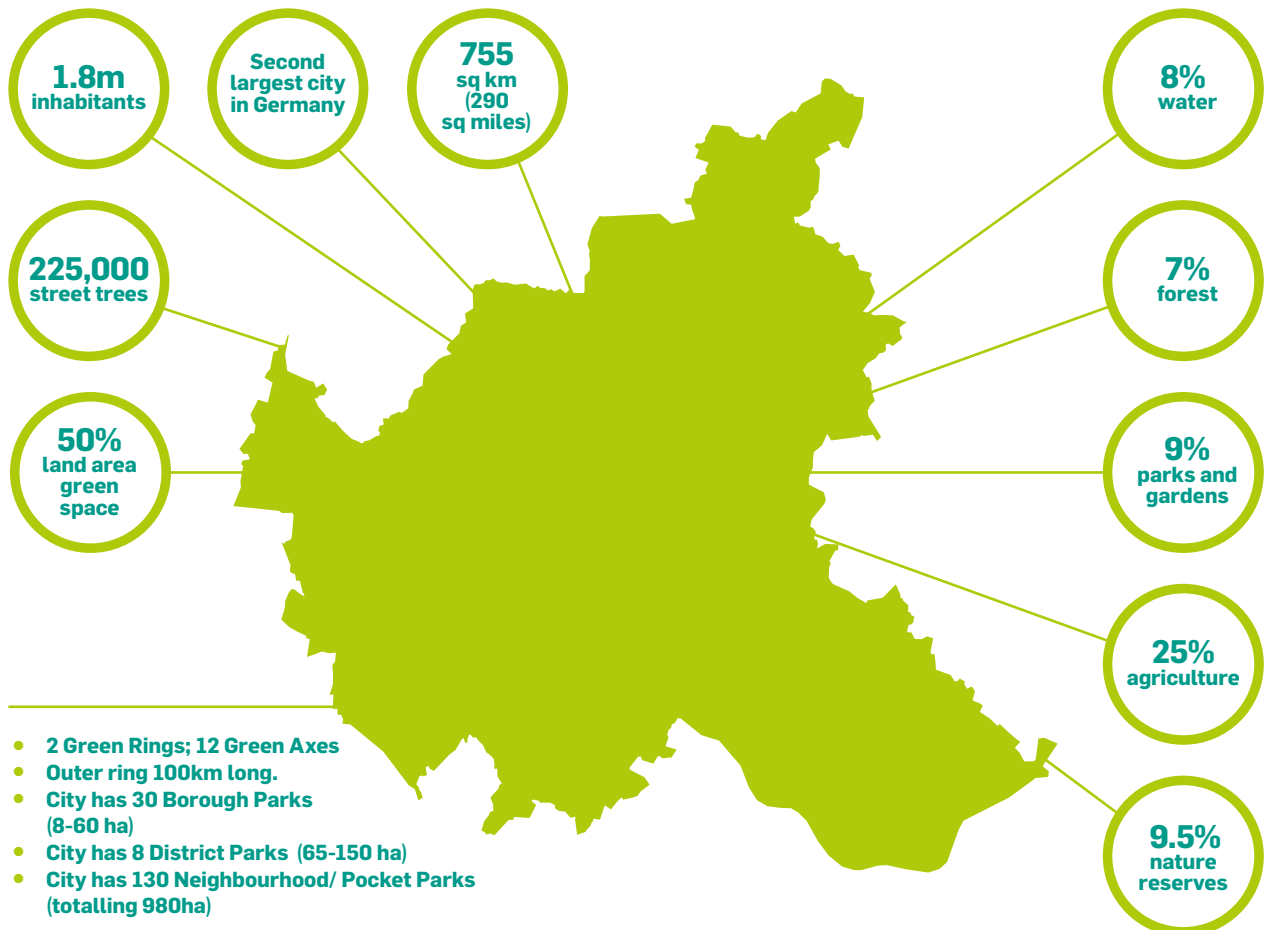
**The challenge for the city is to expand and improve all the component parts of this network, which faces financial and development pressures as Hamburg's population continues to grow**



By far the most noticeable characteristic of the network is its connectivity: for example, take the Green Rings. The inner ring is the oldest part and consists of a series of parks and urban plazas which together represent a fascinating record of changing tastes in landscape design. Hamburg scooped three international garden festivals (IGAs) between 1953 and 1973 whose collective legacy is now a large swathe of park. In a similar spirit, the old port 'HafenCity' has new urban spaces which are key parts of the area's restoration, each of which contributes to the contiguous nature of the inner ring. Thus, as the City grows so does the ring. The more extensive outer ring is an evolving feast whose main aim is to tie together disparate open spaces including historic city-parks, wetlands and marshes, cemeteries and heathlands; collectively this produces an unbroken green route 100km long, enabling residents to circumnavigate the city.

No less important are the 'Green Axes': a dozen routes that stretch 10-25km from the city centre and, in terms of nature conservation and habitats, these are far more valuable. Some are based on the water courses that feed the Alster, characterized by marshland and ponds, whilst others contain semi-natural heathland, grassland and woods on the periphery of the metropolitan area. The arable

land and riverine flood plains that are concentrated in the south have corridors that extend northwards towards the Elbe and the city. All these valuable environments are accessible and enable many species of plants and animals to penetrate and colonise the city. By necessity, as these axes come further into the city they narrow and become more managed, some eventually becoming avenues and verges.





They continue, however, to provide a means by which the natural world has a part in the lives of the city's residents.

Nevertheless, the challenge for the city is to expand and improve all the component parts of this network, which faces financial and development pressures as Hamburg's population continues to grow. The City actively looks for gaps and tries to fill them, with scores of ongoing projects and initiatives to ensure easy access and even distribution, and a vital programme of education to widen their appreciation. For example, along some of the green axes there are 100,000 people within 5 minutes' walk, but a lot of people don't realise what's on their doorstep, which is of some concern.

The future aims of the 'Green Network' are by necessity evolving, both geographically and aspirationally. Hamburg is bursting at the seams and one focus is to grow south, to areas perceived as environmentally scarred by industry. Hence the 'Leap Across the Elbe' initiative which has focused attention and funds on creating a new exemplar community with three themes of safeguarding the climate, encouraging cultural diversity and making new spaces for the city. Thus in 2013 another IGA created the 70 ha 'Wilhelmsburger Inselpark', a rich mosaic of restored waterbodies, wetlands, allotments and gardens which has changed perception of this district and 'plugged' it into the wider green community.

Additionally, new spaces are assessed for their 'usefulness' in terms of nature conservation and areas which contain rare habitats are prioritized. Hence, three new nature reserves totalling 400ha have been created since 2017, making up around 9.5% of the metropolitan area. The newest, in Diekbek, will be the 36th. An interesting aspect of the city's strategy is the 'Mammal Atlas', which collects data (partly by paid biologists and partly by volunteer bodies) mapping the biotopes and species. The resultant 'Habitats Directive' monitors the health and diversity of all the city's residents, and highlights where action needs to be taken. It demonstrates that nearly 60 species are endemic to the city, including deer, bats, seals and shrews, and includes protected endangered species like the brown hare; with visitors like boar and raccoons.

It is widely accepted that green roofs can be a credible and viable part of a city's green credentials helping to mitigate climatic fluctuation and help biodiversity. Thus, Hamburg has developed a strategy to significantly increase green roofs in the next 5 years, allocating a budget of 3 million Euros and a compelling communications strategy showing what can be

achieved. Hamburg is something of a pioneer in Germany, in terms of its approach and the initiative has much to contribute to reducing some of the more extreme effects of urbanisation.

In summary, the crowning achievement of Hamburg's 'Green Network' is its historic continuity: its presence is embedded in the psyche of the place. Paradoxically this can also create ambivalence: where the network could be 'taken for granted' and picked apart slowly and incrementally. Environmental protection requires an economic or political imperative and in Hamburg the latter criterion has been constant and compelling. From 1920 there has been energetic political backing to make and keep Hamburg as a 'Green Metropolis'. This can be traced from the original 'Axial Concept' to the 20th century IGAs; from Hamburg's tenure as 'European Green Capital' in 2011 to 2013's 'Leap Across the Elbe' with its international building exhibitions and IGAs and through to the City's current 100 year-old 'GrünesNetzHamburg'. The recent Green Party's advances in this year's elections, mean that the value and relevance of landscape in facing the challenges of our times permeates all levels of the city's planning. The result is a wonderfully green and verdant city where nature truly has its place.

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**4. The refurbished 'Kuhmühlenteich' water basin on the inner reaches of the 'Wandsee'.**

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**5. The inner reaches of the 'Wandsee'.**

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