

THE BEST OF 2021

Mayors of Europe

MAYORS
EUROPE **Of**

Mayor of Athens

Kostas Bakoyannis



Introduction

Back in 2008, the world has achieved a significant milestone: for the first time in history, 50% of the human population was living in urban areas.

Last year, this percentage rose up to 55%, meaning that 4,2 billion people have been living in cities. By 2050, it is estimated that nearly 7 of 10 people in the world will live in cities.

All these numbers address the importance of mayor's role in the urban and social

transformation, economic development and the overall cities' improvement.

Strong and consistent urban economies are essential for reducing the poverty and providing adequate housing, infrastructure, education, health and safety.

Ambitious and dedicated leaders that can respond to the growing needs of urban residents but also the fast-changing global circumstances are needed more than ever.

Kostas Bakoyannis has been serving as mayor of Athens since 2019 and has done numerous great things to improve the overall quality of life in the city.

2021 can rightfully be described as yet another successful year in the career of mayor Bakoyannis: from infrastructure and smart city developments to the fight against climate change,

Kostas Bakoyannis has successfully carried out various projects and is leading the city on the challenging road of urban transformation.

Here are just some of the highlights by [Mayors of Europe](#) regarding mayor Bakoyannis' notable accomplishments in 2021.

Strong commitment to climate action

Climate change is one of the most debated scientific issues in the past 20 years.

One of the fatalities which is linked to climate change is the rise of temperatures around the world.

The past six years have been the warmest ones since 1880, while 2020 made the "Top three warmest years" list.

According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), 2020 was 1.2°C above pre-industrial era temperatures and it is predicted a 20% probability that temperatures will temporarily exceed 1.5°C as early as 2024.

One of the ways of responding to rising temperatures for cities is hiring a "Chief Heat Officer". Miami-Dade is the first county in the world which appointed someone for this position.

Just a few weeks after Miami, [mayor Bakoyannis became the first European mayor to appoint a CHO.](#)

Following this decision, he stated: "I have a vision for a cooler, greener Athens. Climate change for our city means more frequent and dangerous extreme high temperatures for residents and for tourists who are critical for our economy. Unfortunately, Athens is not unique – heat is an emergency for cities across Europe and the world. Joining City Champions for Heat Action will help me accelerate the protection of vulnerable people and find the best cooling solutions for long-term health and wellbeing."

Mayor Bakoyannis keeps on improving the standard of living in the Greek capital and [fighting climate change in so many other ways](#), too. He intends to make the city more sustainable and is finding ways to address climate change immediately.

Many things have already been done regarding urban regeneration and “green” projects: for example, the [creation of mini-parks \(pocket parks\) in inner-city neighborhoods](#), planting more trees and greenery, the Grand Walk project which created more space for the public, the Syntagma Square overhaul currently underway, the Omonia square revamp, the reoperation of city fountains...

Athens, like many other large cities across the globe, suffers from a lack of free public, green spaces.

With the initiative of “[Pocket parks](#)”, mayor Bakoyannis is successfully solving two serious problems with one single action: [abandoned spaces are being recreated in small oases of greenery](#), completely free of charge for all the citizens.

Mayor Bakoyannis said: “There are many ways to reactivate the neighbourhood community. Pocket parks are one such essential solution.

They breathe life into areas where debris, darkness and delinquency once stood”.

What is more, an advanced technology photovoltaic system is being used for the park’s lighting, which is another successful way of fighting climate change.

Scientists from all over the world are promoting Pocket parks as an effective way to protect the environment, as well as to mitigate isolation in densely populated areas and prevent crime.

Mayor Bakoyannis stated that pocket parks may not be able to change the city but [they can change its neighborhoods](#) and when added together, they create a meaningful result in the Greek capital.

Mayor Bakoyannis said: “We need public space. Athens currently holds three records: it has the least green space per capita, the largest building volume per capita and the most paved area (with asphalt) per capita. This leads us to the conclusion that we need to redesign the city. This also requires brave decisions which can be difficult, but are decisions that will be excellent for the future and not for the past”.

Smart solutions for improving the quality of life

The City of Athens is already offering so many smart city solutions for its residents: from free wireless internet access in public spaces, public transportation apps to tourism-wise applications, such as those concerning the best beaches, museums, etc.

This year, the City of Athens, the digital business agency ATCOM and Microsoft developed "[Project Athena](#)", a new and innovative technology program which aims to improve quality of life in Athens in terms of cleanliness and accessibility.

The goal is to collect data on street and air cleanliness, accessibility for pedestrians and people with disabilities, noise pollution, air temperature and humidity.

Sensors are positioned in garbage bins to measure their fill-levels, at pedestrian crossings to detect any possible obstacles, at the Athens City Hall and in various individual parts of the city.

They monitor the everyday habits of residents and visitors, and offer direct and credible data.

This data provides the possibility to intervene and offer solutions to become more effective and precise in the changes made in the city.

Furthermore, the Greek government announced a [new Smart Cities program](#) which will involve digital transformation of municipalities. The program will be funded with 320 million euros.

The digitization of the city's services and its transition to the digital era are part of this program. Mayor Bakoyannis announced a pilot project aimed at monitoring illegal parking on disability ramps. He added that currently, 120 municipal services are provided online and free of red-tape to Athens residents.

Some of the sectors that municipalities will be able to operate digitally include, among others, social policy, employment, health, education, culture, sports, environment, infrastructure, transport, tourism and financial management.

Improving the city's infrastructure

Although the citizens of Athens are known as people who use their cars very frequently, the great local public transport revolution of recent years is gradually changing their minds. Besides a total renewal of the bus, metro and tram systems, many kilometres of preferential lanes have been built along with tens of kilometres of new lines for rail transport.

Furthermore, mayor Bakoyannis is working hard to [make the sidewalks in Athens more friendly and safe for walkers](#). This has been a problem for some time now because of many obstacles such as extended door steps, parked cars and motorbikes, but now the issue is to be solved.

After creating the experimental Grand Walk that reduces vehicular avenues for wider walking areas through the heart of the city, the municipality plans to restore and upgrade sidewalks that are difficult or dangerous to navigate, often forcing people to walk in the streets.

The project is worth 24 million euro and is a part of large-scale projects implemented by the City of Athens under the title Culture of Everyday Life.

The project should be completed in two years and foresees the creation of 410 new sidewalks made of modern materials, catering to the needs of pedestrians, including the disabled.

At the beginning of 2021, the Municipality of Athens announced that it is handing over [63 abandoned buildings for renovation](#) as part of its city regeneration plan.

"It is our great opportunity to re-introduce ourselves to Athens," said mayor of Athens Kostas Bakoyannis, stressing that the effort requires patience, coordination and persistence.

The municipal authority aims to pave the way for the buildings' renovation and "return to society". Formerly occupied by squatters, the derelict buildings, many of which are architectural gems, are mostly located in central Athens.

In the last year, 63 buildings, squares, properties were cleared away and illegal residents evicted.

The properties in the inner-city neighborhoods of Omonia, Theatrou Square, Patissia, Acropolis, Metaxourgeio, and Psyrri have also been sanitized and are now ready to be restored and put to new use bringing a sense of safety to residents and added value to the city.

Athens also takes care of its monumental fountains: [34 iconic ones are scheduled to be repaired and maintained](#).

The start has been made with the famous Omonia fountain, which was put back during a recent overhaul to restore the square to its former, emblematic character. According to the mayor, the “quality of day to day life is determined by all the things that are beside us or in front of us but we did not see them because they had been neglected, forgotten. Now, we are making these parts of the city visible.”

Creation of new touristic opportunities for Athens

When the coronavirus pandemic shook the planet, many people started adopting a new “work from home” regime. It also caused the accelerated rise of a well-known digital nomad workforce. People who regularly travel, bouncing from country to country, while at the same time managing their online businesses are known as digital nomads.

Since the start of the pandemic, the number of digital nomads has more than doubled compared with 2019.

Mayor Bakoyannis recognized these valuable statistics and he devoted “This is Athens”

campaign to [attracting digital nomads from all around the world](#) in Athens, along with the legendary slogan: “Even the lockdown is more beautiful in Athens”.

He said adaptability was the key to moving forward and that, apart from being an [ideal tourist destination](#), Athens can evolve into a hub of innovation and entrepreneurship in the South-eastern Mediterranean for investments and talent.

“We’re doing our best to become better for those who will choose Athens as a reference point for their work from a distance. We open ourselves to the world, not only with what our past and our history have to offer, but also for a more modern way of life in our city”, stated the mayor following the campaign.

Besides attracting digital nomads, mayor Bakoyannis made [huge efforts to promote the city's preparation for the summer season](#) with the support of the “Athens Tourism Partnership”, an initiative that promotes Athens as an all-year round city break destination.

Another successful project was [Athens' promotion as filming destination](#). After attracting major international productions, the development of film tourism is further improving the position of Athens among Europe’s most competitive destinations.

Mayor Bakoyannis said: “Within its first year, the Athens Film Office has proved that it can increase the cultural and tourism capital, not only of Athens but of Greece as well. It has become the city’s communication channel with international productions and a way of financially stimulating the market during this very difficult period”.

Also, Athens municipality has joined forces with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) to assess the sustainability status of the Greek capital based on the [17 Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) of the United Nations. The aim of this partnership is to improve the standard of living and achieve ambitious sustainability targets. The mayor said that “the certification of Athens as a sustainable tourist destination will offer the city greater dynamic as it will now be able to compete with major European destinations both in terms of quality of life and of destination management”.

Conclusion

It is obvious that cities have an incredibly important role in the social transformation. They are centres of artistic, scientific and technological innovations, of culture and education.

What is more, cities are the driving force for economic development and Kostas Bakoyannis is a prime example of the mayor who understands the important link between economic growth and urbanization.

Thanks to mayor Bakoyannis, Athens has successfully closed the 2021 chapter of its book. Due to his hard work and commitment, the city is on the right track to fulfil its ambitious goals in several fields. The Greek capital is being reborn and it remains to be seen how far it will go during 2022.

Mayors of Europe is excited to follow Athens on its journey and we cannot wait to witness new amazing achievements that will undoubtedly be reached by mayor Bakonyannis in the upcoming year.