

Saint-Omer //



WETLAND
CITY

Associated Ramsar site :
Marais audomarois

Accreditation date :
October 25, 2018

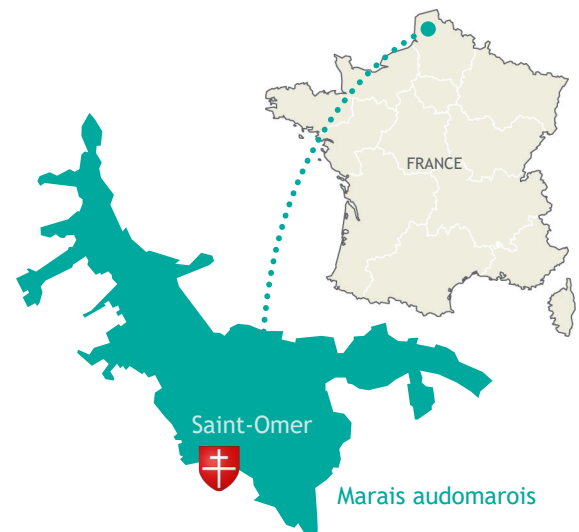
Coordinates :
50° 45'N 2° 15'E

City's presentation

Founded by monks at the end of the 7th century, the city of Saint-Omer developed around its marsh for security and nurturing reasons. Previously, the marsh was "a deserted and uncultivated land, bristled with forests, drowned in swamps". Under the impulse of the monks of Saint-Bertin, the local population was encouraged to develop large gardens at the edge of the city. This is how, gradually, canals have been dug and lands drained off, on the outskirts of Saint-Omer. Step by step, the city became independent of its marsh.

Since the 12th century, Saint-Omer was the compulsory transit point of the navigation towards the sea, with the previous rivers digging. Other developments occurred until the beginning of the 19th century. The current image of the marsh was already well established in this period.

Visitors would be wrong to see Saint-Omer only as a city of old stones. The links between the city and the marsh are numerous, particularly with three typical and picturesque suburbs that are the Haut-Pont, Lyzel and Fishmonger's street. Saint-Omer is forever between city and marsh.



Informations about the city

Mayor : François DECOSTER
Region : Hauts de France
Department : Pas-de-Calais (62)
Population : 15 192 inhabitants (2019)
City area : 1632 ha
Wetlands area : 1440 ha
Ramsar site area : 1440 ha



Types of wetlands

The city of Saint-Omer is the french capital of summer cauliflower. In fact, it is probably the only wetland city with 350 hectares of vegetable crops, since at least 800 years. In the early Middle Age, ponds have been dug to extract peat, but also for fish production on holy days. In some places, the marsh evolution in the 20th century left some space for the nature to resume its rights.

The marsh of Saint-Omer is composed of :

- vegetable land on peat soils,
- grassland,
- ponds,
- rivers and ditches,
- reed beds and tall herbs,
- peaty wood.

Ramsar city actions for wetlands



AVOIDING WETLANDS DEGRADATION AND DESTRUCTION

The pre-emptive zones established by the Department of Pas-de-Calais since 1978 facilitated the preservation of some marshes sensitive areas and permitted to fight the environment trivialization and illegal constructions. Saint-Omer joined the natural regional park's charter in 1986 to find solutions for the preservation of this very sensitive and remarkable site.

Since then, the city has deliberated favorably for the creation of the Romelaère ponds National Natural Reserve, formalized the same year as the Ramsar classification (in 2008). In 2007, the city deliberated to allow the Conservatoire du Littoral to set up intervention or pre-emptive areas on sensitive sectors.



ENCOURAGING WETLANDS RESTORATION OR CREATION

Saint-Omer is one of the members of the management committees of the Romelaère ponds National Natural Reserve. The city also sustained the definition of the intervention perimeters of the Conservatoire du Littoral, in order to increase the managed areas in the marsh.

The city actively participates to the "Marsh" working group from the Park and the urban agglomeration. This group is the strong arm of the development, the animation and the monitoring of activities in the Ramsar site.

In 2018, the city applied for the "Wetland city" recognition of the Ramsar Convention to confirm the interest of the city in its wetland and the strong link with its marsh.



ENGAGING THE POPULATION IN WETLAND MANAGEMENT

Inhabitants of the city regularly receive information to make them aware of actions that have to be taken to long-term preserve this exceptional territory.

The integration of the city into the Caps et marais d'Opale Regional Natural Park, the Ramsar site and the Biosphere Reserve has pooled resources and actions.

The Park and other partners, like Eden 62, carry out many actions of environmental education and awareness on nature and wetlands. In the same way, natural sites open to the public are managed by organizations whose main mission is environmental education. Therefore, it can be said that a fairly large part of the wetland management awareness has been delegated.



INTEGRATING WETLANDS IN THE CITY'S SPATIAL/LAND-USE PLANNING

The urban planning of Saint-Omer is defined in an Local Intercommunal Urban Plan. Almost all marsh areas have been classified as Natural or Agricultural areas, protected from construction projects. Some adaptation has been made to accommodate with the specificities of marsh suburbs, which represent several hundred houses, some of which isolated or on islands.

The 7th section of wateringues, a forced association of owners, is in charge of the management and maintenance of the marsh's rivers.



RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS ABOUT WETLANDS

Saint-Omer is an active city for the organization of local and national events on wetlands.

For example, in 2013, the National Symposium of French Ramsar Sites was organized in Saint-Omer with the support of the city.

Each year, the city is a partner of World Wetlands Day by making its facilities available or hosting thematic exhibitions.



APPLYING STANDARDS ON WATER QUALITY AND SANITATION

The «Clean Marshes and Villages" operation carried by the Regional Natural Park, the Agglomeration and the communes, allows the collection of waste from the marsh since 1988. Between 10 and 20 tons of waste are thus collected each year, sorted when it is possible and sent to a controlled landfill.

The city of Saint-Omer has implemented related operations with neighborhood houses, the Community of Agglomeration of the Pays de Saint-Omer and other associations in order to organize similar operations and thus raising younger generations awareness to respect nature.



The Wetlands City accreditation of the Ramsar Convention

It aims to promote cities close to or dependent on wetlands of international importance, and which integrate the consideration of these areas in the development of their territory, thereby implementing a positive relationship with these invaluable ecosystems, particularly through preservation measures and greater public awareness.