

OPENING SPEECH

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Ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Håkan Brynielsson and I am working as Chief Executive Officer at the Regional Council in Kalmar County. The Regional Council is a coordinating body for the twelve local authorities and the county council in Kalmar County. Our mission is to examine and test new ways of developing the region in such areas as growth and employment, communications, Baltic issues, culture, tourism, environment and primary units of local government.

My intention with this speech is to show some examples how we deal with waste related questions from a perspective of regional development. As an introduction, I would like to declare that there is growing evidence today that we may be moving beyond the carrying capacity of the environment on a number of fronts. One of these serious tendencies refers to our use of non-renewable resources, a matter closely associated with the generation of wastes.

Among many economists and spatial planners, waste and handling of waste are looked upon as some of the most important limitations for growth and development. I agree with this opinion. If we continue with our current consumption and production patterns, it will all end up with continuously increasing quantities of waste. A significant portion will still be hazardous, giving rise to the kind of problems and measures that you are going to talk about during the coming three days here in Kalmar.

This means that all kinds of matters concerning waste are of great importance for the possibilities of having a sustainable growth and development in our region as well as nationally and internationally. The task for us is to find ways of decoupling the generation of waste from economic growth and achieve a significant overall reduction in the volumes of waste generated.

We have to work on different levels and with different type of tools and methods to achieve this. Firstly, there must be an agreement involving as many as possible of the parties concerned in the region, to focus on a common objective regarding reduction of waste generation. This common objective has been settled in the recently revised Regional Development Programme, a programme containing guidelines for work with growth and development on local and regional level in Kalmar County. One of the highlighted objectives in the Regional Development Programme is Non-toxic and resource efficient eco-cycles.

To fulfil this objective, we have to face one of the most challenging aspects of the waste issue. That is to find measures to prevent the formation of new waste that do not affect the economical growth negatively, in other words measures resembling the first steps towards a new dematerialised economy for the twenty-first century.

It is interesting to note that the responsibility for waste prevention is not regulated in such detail as other parts of the waste management scheme, for instance collecting and final disposal, in the Swedish Environmental Code. However, it is even more necessary to find solutions on this task than others concerning waste, if we want to continue on the road towards an ecological sustainable society.

Secondly, to be successful, actions to prevent waste generation must first and foremost be done as near the source of production as possible. This is the reason why preparations now are being taken for visiting as many enterprises as possible, and especially small and medium sized ones, during next year trying to find possible actions for reducing the generation of waste. This work will be coordinated in a project named 'Environmental Cooperation in South-East Sweden', and will involve all authorities on both local and regional level in Kalmar County responsible for supervision of environmental protection measures according to the Environmental Code.

Thirdly, we have to put on efforts to follow up the results of the different actions performed in our region, for instance the effects of the above mentioned visits to enterprises in 2004. I hope I will have the opportunity to present the results in due course at a forthcoming ECO-TECH conference.

It is however, not enough just to concentrate on preventive measures like decoupling economical growth from waste generation. We also have to take the necessary steps to pay off our environmental debt, for example to clean polluted areas and take care of substances or fluids with toxic and hazardous properties that are spread in the society. These items are as you know the main subjects of this ECO-TECH conference, but also two areas with a nationally very high degree of knowledge and competence located to Kalmar County. You will during the next days have the opportunity to visit some of the even internationally renowned remediation projects that have been accomplished in our region. Much of the proficiency gained by the different projects have been assembled in Sustainable Sweden South East Limited, a company established in partnership between enterprises and local authorities from this part of Sweden with the purpose to export the accumulated knowledge and technical skill.

A lot can be done by preventive measures and cleaning actions. But viewed in a long time perspective, we have to deeply consider if our life-style is compatible with the different aspects of sustainable development. Existing efforts to integrate environmental considerations into other policy areas and decisions need to be reinforced. This is a question about survival and responsibility.

At the moment The Regional Council in Kalmar County, in co-operation with the County Administrative Board, the County Council and the municipalities, is running a project aiming to raise the awareness and concordance about sustainable development among

different kind of stakeholders within the county. The challenge is to find good ways to discuss the three parts of sustainability – social, economic and ecological sustainability – in one context.

There are several parts of the project, among else different kind of information, education and discussion activities and special appointed ambassadors for sustainable development. In connection to the Regional Development Programme we have made a sustainability analysis and decided about an indicator set for sustainable development in Kalmar County. This indicator set contains economic as well as ecological and social indicators and is meant as a way to follow and discuss the future development.

Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary-General has said “Our biggest challenge in this new century is to take an idea that sounds abstract —sustainable development — and turn it into reality for all the world’s people”. It is not a simple task but nonetheless important. In the project Towards Sustainable Development in Kalmar County we are taking some steps in this direction.

Thank you for listening.