

# Responsible Management pays off for Local Governments



Polluted lakes as starting point for sustainable development in Växjö. Foto: Holger Robrecht

"We will continue to be a leading environmental municipality. All areas of our operations will be run and developed taking great account of conditions that the environment and local and global natural resources allow. All this to ensure current and future generations a healthy and good environment."

City of Växjö, Environmental Programme, 2006

The city of Växjö, Sweden, is a "dynamic, forward-looking city and the optimism is well merited. Växjö has an increasing population with a young age profile. It is easy to grow and develop in Växjö – both for companies and for people." And in fact, Växjö itself is growing. With a land area of 1676 km<sup>2</sup>, the city is home to approximately 80.000 people. Between 1996 and 2001 it welcomed about 1000 new inhabitants, whereas statistics show more than 6000 new inhabitants

between 2001 and 2007. Economically, Växjö is proud of a 50% growth compared to 1993. A successful city. A responsible city.

The city achieved a decoupling of economic growth from environmental resource consumption. In fact, Växjö's economic growth was achieved while at the same time decreasing CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions by 30% since 1993. The development is stable. The severe hurricane of January 2005, which destroyed forest area the equivalent of 8 years of forestation, diminished growth significantly, but Växjö's development is strong enough to absorb the losses.

Undoubtedly, Växjö's current dynamic development is rooted in an environmental disaster. In the 1960s, Växjö suffered from polluted lakes all around the city. 1970, the City

Council decided to start massive restoration work to clean the lakes. It was the starting point of responsible management. Consequently, in 1996 the City Council unanimously decided to become fossil-fuel free. In 2006, the new Environmental Programme for the City of Växjö was adopted, including an Environmental Policy and three profile areas: Living live, Our Nature and Fossil Fuel Free Växjö. eco-BUDGET (www.ecobudget.de), the environmental management system is steering and following up the goals in the Environmental Programme. Meanwhile, the Council is also about to include social indicators on board. The achievements are internationally recognised. "In Europe's greenest city, even its power plant (bio-mass, the Author) smells more like a sauna", The Independent titled on 24th of July 2007.

Växjö's responsible management displays on the Council's web-site: "All municipal departments and companies are responsible for their work to get a sustainable development. The municipality of Växjö is not able to solve the world's environmental problems, but we can all participate and share the responsibility. What we do locally also has a global impact!" In fact, the city partners in international networks and projects with a number of local governments, even in the Philippines and in India, to implement responsible management and achieve tangible improvements of the global sustainability.

The importance of responsible cities such as Växjö cannot be over-estimated. UNEP reports that cities occupy

just 2 % of the world's terrestrial surface but consume up to 75% of natural resources.

By 2020, approximately 80 % of Europeans will live in urban areas. The growing demand for housing, goods, transport, waste disposal, and tourism is putting pressure on the quality of land, air and water. In coming decades, these pressures are expected to increase and European cities and towns will need to face several interconnected challenges. In addition, urban development cannot be seen isolated from its surrounding 'hinterland' as growing cities need an increasing supply of natural resources for their production and consumption needs.

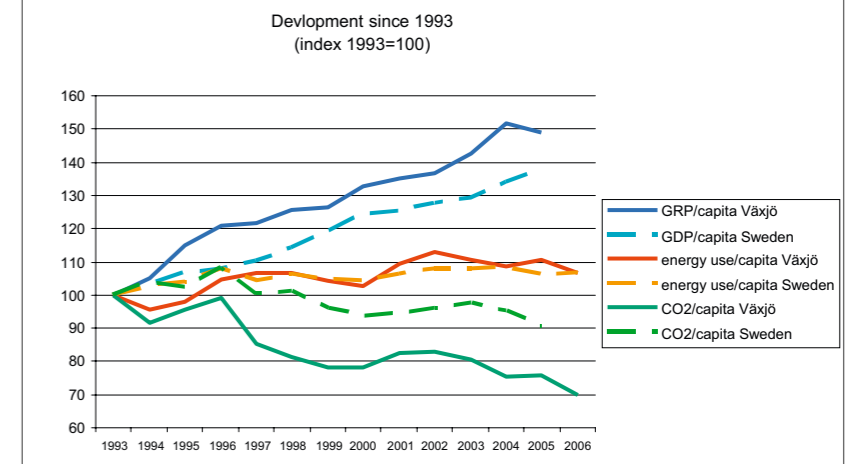
In response to these challenges, more than 520 European cities have signed the Aalborg Commitments, a European framework for local sustainable development, that has recognised and admitted that for the sake of sustainable development, economic, social and environmental aspects have to be considered simultaneously. Only by advancing together they can reinforce innovation, creativity, economic growth and job opportunities. The Aalborg Commitments require a cyclic process for implementing and evaluating.

Supported by ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability and other partners, the cities of Växjö and Lahti together with more than 20 cities, towns and regions in Europe have



A view on responsible Investment: Holger Robrecht together with Lord Mayor Werner Spec, City of Ludwigsburg, visits to the biomass power plant of Växjö. With them are Ulf Johnson, Manager of Växjö Energi AB and Anna Carlsson, Planning Department, City of Växjö. Foto: Bodo Skaletz, Ludwigsburg

## Fossil Fuel Free Växjö



Decoupled growth. Source: City of Växjö, 2008

implemented integrated management system (IMS). The goal of the IMS is to provide sustainability with political decision making as the key element. Politicians are responsible for balancing the resources available to them to ensure citizens a good quality of life, and are concurrently dealing with natural, social and financial resources in an efficient way. All of these resources are core to cities. The IMS facilitates this balancing between resources and their integration in decision-making for sustainable development. Even though IMS fulfils the requirements of ISO 14001 and EMAS, it manages more than just the environmental aspects and focuses on strategic aspects within the responsibility of a local government – the called 'indirect' aspects by EMAS and ISO 14001.

"The IMS produces information to leaders and decision makers about different impacts and effects of the organisation's activities simultaneously and comprehensively. This is especially important regarding activities where impacts are long term and widespread in the community. This leads to a higher quality of planning and decision making."

Timo Permanto, City of Lahti, Finland

The IMS is highlighted in the published guidance in relation to the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment. It is a key instrument for cities and

regions to fulfil EU policies such as the Lisbon Agenda, the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable Cities, and the EU Territorial Agenda. This becomes in particular evident in the New Member States, where the current focus is on infrastructure development for water, waste and transport. Investment decisions in these areas made today will determine development of large European regions in the long-term. Cities and Regions using IMS can prove responsible management of this development and effectively evaluate the sustainability impacts of the EU's Structural Funds.



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