

RCE Skane – the first Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development in Scandinavia and the Baltic Region

Kerstin Sonesson, Teacher Education, Malmö University, SE-205 06 Malmö
kerstin.sonesson@lut.mah.se

The first Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Scandinavia and the Baltic Region was created in Skane, southernmost Sweden, by a partnership led by Malmö University, Lund University, the City of Lund, the City of Malmö and Region Skane during 2006. The process of creating RCE Skane during 2006 is described in the paper.

An RCE is a network of existing formal, non-formal and informal education organisations, mobilised to deliver ESD to local and regional communities (www.ias.unu.edu/efsd). A network of RCEs worldwide will constitute the Global learning Space for Sustainable Development. RCEs aspire to achieve the goals of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014), by translating its global objectives into the context of the local communities in which they operate. The total number of acknowledged RCEs is 35, of which 7 RCEs in Europe. The programme on RCE was launched by the United Nations University, Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU-IAS), and the Global Service Centre for RCEs has been established at UNU-IAS to provide assistance and to facilitate communication and networking.

Description of the RCE Skane

The RCE Skane covers the geographical area of Skane, which is Sweden's southernmost region covering 11 346 km² and with 1.1M inhabitants (13% of Sweden's population on 2.5% of its land area, see Figure 1).

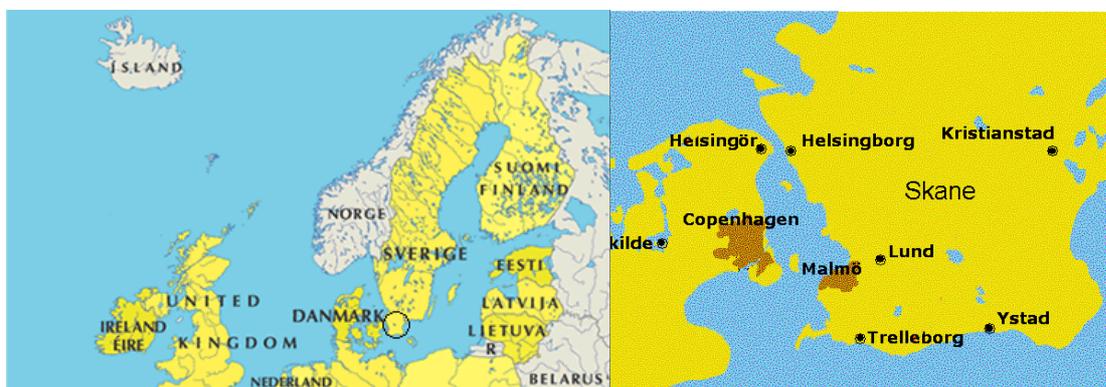


Figure 1. Skane is Sweden's southernmost region.

Skane is a well-defined and strategically positioned border region between central Europe, Scandinavia and the Baltic. The region has a strong identity, but is also a border region which, through the ages, has belonged to both Denmark and Sweden and has been subject to many external influences. Skane is nowadays characterised by new influences and regional development and is both a multi-cultural part of the new dynamic Öresund Region and at the same time a region in its own right with strong links and traditions within Sweden.

The RCE Skane is organised primarily as a regional partnership between Malmö University, the City of Malmö, the City of Lund, Lund University and Region Skane. Additional partners will be included at a later date. There is established partnership with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in Alnarp, Kristianstad University, various companies and several NGOs in the region. These are but a few of the important potential future partners in the RCE Skane.

Process of RCE development in Skane

Initially, the effort to establish an RCE in Skane began in the autumn of 2005 following a meeting between the former State secretary, special advisor to the Swedish UNESCO, Mr Carl Lindberg, and representatives from Malmö University, the City of Malmö, Lund University, the City of Lund and Region Skane. In September 2005, Malmö University initiated the project *Skane - a pilotregion on education for sustainable development* (see www.mah.se/lut/nms/rce) and funding was raised from Region Skane Miljövårdsfond, City of Malmö and Malmö University.

Members from the five organisations started a working group to initiate and establish a cooperation on ESD in Skane and furthermore, to write an application to UNU on becoming an RCE. Since February 2006, this working group has had regular meetings, conducted a baseline study, organised a conference and have made two valuable study visits to RCE Rhine-Meuse to discuss, observe and study their RCE. During 2006 the project coordinator, on several occasions, gave information to various stakeholders at seminars, conferences and local meetings. RCE Candidate Skane was represented at the International Conference on RCEs, April 2006, Yokohama. The working group for RCE Candidate Skane arranged a conference, which took place 15 November. More than 50 different organisations from Skane was represented at the conference and besides presenting RCE Candidate Skane, a main topic was to discuss how future cooperation on ESD can be developed within different areas of interest.

At a meeting in Paris on 5 December 2006, the Ubuntu Committee of Peers for RCEs recommended the United Nations University to acknowledge RCE Skane and RCE Skane was officially acknowledged by UNU on 10 January 2007. The Committee recommended that all European RCEs and RCE Candidates should explore a possibility to collaborate with the European Network of Regions on Education for Sustainability.

All five partners work, in creating the RCE Skane, systematically with sustainable development within their respective organisation. Lund and Malmö are close to each other in south western Skane and cooperate increasingly. The RCE will initially focus on ESD in Lund-Malmö but the aim is as soon as possible to extend the partnership to cover the whole region and involve all players who can and want to contribute to ESD.

The process of development is dependant on the rapidity of the extension of actors and organisations involved in RCE Skane. The RCE strategy is to work in an inclusive manner and to endeavour to make it possible for small actors as well as bigger organisations to evolve partnership within the RCE Skane.

Vision

Our common vision is to make Skane a leading example for the rest of Sweden, Scandinavia, the Baltic region and the world, on how to deliver education for sustainable development (ESD) at all levels and in accordance with the ambitions of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD). The RCE Skane will contribute to the empowerment of people of all ages in the region to assume responsibility for creating a better tomorrow and a sustainable future. It is also envisioned that the RCE Skane will become a catalyst in strengthening those who are currently striving for sustainable development in the region, and act as a platform for partnerships with other parts of the world.

Major sustainable development challenges of the Region

Prior to the RCE application we conducted a baseline study, inclusive a survey in order to identify the local problems and major challenges in Skane.

1. From an ecological perspective, Skane must reduce its local and global impact on the environment. Certain areas of priority in which it is critical to develop sustainable systems and solutions are energy, transport, agriculture, consumption and urban development.

2. From a social perspective, the region must work toward ethnic integration, a lower unemployment rate and gender equality.
3. From an economic perspective, the region must work toward a sustainable economic development, in the context of products and services, in an environmentally and socially sound manner. Research, new innovations and product development are crucial in order to be competitive.

Objectives

The RCE Skane will focus on the following objectives to meet the common goal:

1. To act as a base for ESD in the region. The centre will coordinate different activities to promote synergies between the different actors, organise networks and different educational activities.
2. To continuously survey and document the progress of ongoing activities on ESD in the region, to identify the needs and challenges within the area and find solutions using available knowledge and resources.
3. Support the Swedish National Agency for School Improvement in developing and implementing national targets to introduce ESD in the curriculum by promoting the status of “School for Sustainable Development”.
4. Develop a common platform for research on and for ESD in the region and strengthen links between research and the community.
5. Act as a facilitator between different educational bodies, such as adult education, public education and higher education to implement the idea of ESD on a broad level.
6. To build up thematic partnerships in areas that is essential for the region.

Collaboration, on-going and planned activities

A combined RCE working group and steering committee has meetings on a monthly basis. Dr Harriet Axelsson, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Malmö University is the chair of the combined group and committee. The members of the steering committee are in higher positions, as mayors and managers, in their respective organisations. As the local municipalities run the Swedish formal school and the local politics are in charge of the economy and organisation of the schools (on a municipality level), the link between the steering committee, the working group and the schools is guaranteed in all education sectors. All levels of formal education – primary, secondary and higher education, as well as non-formal education will be involved in RCE Skane.

One aim of creating RCE Skane was the mobilisation for ESD in Skane. The work so far and planned activities will be presented.

For more information on the organisations involved in creating the RCE Skane, see:

Region Skane

<http://www.skane.se>

<http://www.skane.se/upload/HamtaBestall/Dokument/FactsAboutSkane.pdf>

City of Lund

<http://www.lund.se>

Lund University

<http://www.lu.se>

City of Malmö

<http://www.malmo.se>

Malmö University

<http://www.mah.se>