

Excellencies, dear participants of the Modern Eco-Cities conference

Ladies and Gentlemen,

40 years ago the Nordic Council of Ministers, the main body for political cooperation between governments of The Nordic countries, was established with a secretariat in Copenhagen. And for half of the council of minister's lifetime there have been offices for cooperation in The Baltic capitals as well. This is what we are now celebrating with The Green Growth festival, starting here in Tartu and the conference under the topic Modern Eco-Cities. We will celebrate 20 years of successful cooperation by looking forwards toward a more sustainable future.

The main Nordic strategy "New Bearings for the Nordic Countries" sets long-term goals for how the Nordic countries will develop up until the year 2020 and describes the goals and initiatives the region is working towards between 2009-2012. The strategy is divided into four main areas:

- Climate and renewable energy
- Sustainable production and consumption
- The Nordic welfare state as a tool for sustainable development
- Education and research, public participation and local sustainability strategies.

The status of these four areas will be updated regularly under the Nordic Sustainable Development Indicators.

The topic of sustainability, which we will discuss over the two days in Tartu and Tallinn is originally defined in The Brundtland Report as early as 1987. With this conference our aim is to boost the development of sustainable thinking according to The Nordic strategies and standards as we create living environments in cities for the future.

On behalf of the Nordic Council of Ministers Office in Estonia it's a pleasure to say that cooperation between Estonian and Nordic stakeholders has been encouraging in almost all of the fields. Being in Tartu I must further point out that cooperation between universities, researchers and students is an on-going and important part of the Nordic-Baltic cooperation. The City of Tartu has from an early stage built relations between Twin cities all over the Nordic region. This cooperation was celebrated during the Nordic Festival in May. Because of the close connections to Nordic cities, I believe most of the contents to be discussed here today may be familiar to many of you. Never the less we hope this will still contribute to the thinking of the decision makers and designers of new cities and the rural communities close to cities.

It is always a privilege to work together with such devoted and generous partners. I would like to thank all the partners and sponsors who have made this conference possible. The partners are:

The Finnish Embassy in Tallinn,  
City of Tartu,  
Eesti Maaülikool,  
Tartu Science Park,

Association of Local Authorities of Tartu County,  
Tartu Centre for Creative Industries.

And we can add several generous sponsors to the list as well. You will hear more about some of them during the conference.

Dear participants I wish you all, fruitful discussions for the forthcoming sessions and I hope that you will use the opportunity to network as much as possible –networking is the key word for all cooperation especially when it comes to a sustainable future. We have so much to learn from each other.

Berth Sundström,  
Director of the Nordic Council of Ministers' Office in Estonia