**With a population of more than 9.5 million and a high national GDP, Sweden is widely considered the most affluent country in Scandinavia. High taxes fund expansive social welfare programs and some people point to these as the basis for Sweden's low unemployment rate and long average life expectancy.**

Human settlements occupy just 3 percent of the land in Sweden, which is a country about the same size as California, and forests cover 69 percent of the land. About 7 percent of the land is used for agriculture as subarctic conditions make viable farming difficult in the northern reaches of the country.

**Environmental Issues of Sweden**

According to conservation groups, one of the biggest environmental issues in Sweden is the consequences of the logging industry. The World Wildlife Fund has reported 2000 forest-dwelling species are threatened in Sweden, from birds such as the white-backed woodpecker to species of lichen, moss and fungi. While Sweden has made progress in enhancing sustainable timber harvesting, bad practices remain, according to the WWF.

Another major environmental issue facing Sweden is the pollution of the Baltic Sea caused by pollutants from agriculture sources and waste treatment facilities. According to the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission's Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), Sweden was responsible for 12 percent of the 1 million tons of nitrogen and 9 percent of the 43,000 tons of phosphorus dumped into the Baltic Sea in 2010.

Sweden is also facing its legacy of past industrial emissions in the form of the acidification of its lakes. The country's prolonged industrialization and urbanization in the south has established an acidic water quality issue that threatens native flora and fauna. Fish cannot breed in more than 16,000 Swedish lakes.

**Environmental Policies of Sweden**

Despite having several significant environmental issues, Sweden has positioned itself as a one of the more progressive countries on environmental issues.

Sweden hosted the first UN conference on environment, resulting in the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) which is the leading global environmental authority.

According to the Swedish government, its policies have led to just 1 percent of solid waste going into landfills, with 99 percent of solid waste recycled or used to produce biogas. Since 2005, Sweden has prohibited the selling of plastic drink bottles that do not comply with an approved recycling program.

Sweden was a leader among the Baltic nations during its 2009 presidency of the EU, creating a pilot project among its Baltic neighbors. In 2011, Sweden also created a new government agency, the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management, to handle water pollution issues.

Sweden has also set the goal of zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and emissions are currently one of the lowest in Europe, having decreased by nearly 20 percent since 1990. Many of Sweden's corporations participate in socially responsible business practices and Swedish companies like Ikea are viewed as environmental leaders. Sweden also operates closely with the United States on ecological sustainability and clean technologies.

**Clean Technology in Sweden**

Unlike other countries in Europe, Sweden's clean technology sector is comprised mostly of smaller start-up companies, rather than a handful of large corporate entities. According to Bloomberg Business, Sweden features around 3,500 cleantech companies that collectively book about $14 billion in revenues.

Exports, which can make up approximately a quarter of overall sales, rose 75 percent from 2005 to 2009. To help expand the industry, the Swedish government recently set aside $180 million for cleantech projects.

Even Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustav has embraced clean tech; heating his Drottningholm Palace with wood pellets and driving a Volvo that runs on biofuel. He has also installed energy-saving light bulbs in the royal residences.

Renewable energy sources account for 48 percent of Swedish energy production and Swedish companies have been known to export their knowledge in the bio-energy, wind power and solar power sectors. A Swedish Biogas International plant currently operates in Flint, Michigan and the company has been discussing plans for an expansion.

**A Clean Future?**

In 2016, the greenhouse gas (GHG) emission intensity of the economy for Sweden was the lowest among European countries. It hopes to achieve a vehicle fleet free of fossil fuels by 2030 and no net GHG emissions by 2050. Despite environmental issues tied to Sweden's industrial past and urban present, the country is aggressively taking steps towards a clean future. Among the world leaders in cleantech, Sweden is also exporting their clean mentality across the world with a combination of active citizen engagement and international solidarity.