

Swedish plans to colonise space

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Building a self-reliant moon colony is no longer science fiction, or a gimmick to promote the new James Bond film. It is indeed near-term reality.

After the Apollo landings, the moon returned to its magnificent desolation, and has until recently received very little attention as a target of exploration, let alone settlement. Currently, the Swedish-made SMART-1 is the only spacecraft orbiting the moon. It is scheduled to impact in early 2007, but another Swedish effort is already being launched, designed to make a lasting impact on the way we perceive the moon.

Dr. Niklas Järvstråt, a well-reputed material scientist, devised a plan to put a colony on the lunar surface already a decade ago, long before President Bush revealed his grand plans for a moon base. Now Dr. Järvstråt and the Swedish SMART-Centre has assembled an international consortium to take these initial plans off the drawing board and turn them into reality. The consortium consists of over 50 partners, including industries such as the Japanese Shimizu Corporation and Orbitech, a US NASA-contractor, and academic institutions such as Ecole des Mines, France and Cranfield University, England.

"The principle is simple, but not traditional. It is logical, sustainable and very much within our reach, both materially and financially. Why treat a space project as a disposable unit, when it is possible to build a base, which can thrive, expand, and enhance man's benevolent presence in space?"

That was the basis of Dr. Järvstråt's idea. Being a material scientist, he devised a plan for a colony where men, women, and children can live without the need of a continuous supply of materials and technology from Earth; a self-supporting colony where the great circle of life can be sustained in its entirety by lunar raw materials and where all life-sustaining products will be manufactured in situ.

The colony aims to be self-sustaining in its requirements for sustenance, but it will nevertheless function in symbiosis with Earth. As a result, trade between the lunar colony and Earth will flourish, with the lunar colony contributing towards the development of research and scientific activities, such as, for example, the supply of alternative energy based on advancements in Helium3 fusion power, and provision of structural materials for spacecraft and satellites in earth orbit as well as deep space. At this time of potential fossil fuel shortages, threats of global warming, cultural clashes, and population explosion, this concept might well be what stops man's over-exploitation of Mother Earth by uniting

governments and nations, scientists and laymen in mutual cooperation and understanding.

This research initiative is integrated with ongoing activities at the SMART-Centre in Trollhättan, a part of University West, and an umbrella organization for six manufacturing technology research areas; one of these areas is unique in its research into self-sufficient manufacturing. The Centre has excellent facilities, both on and off campus, and boasts a unique blend of traditional academic values for research and education, combined with a modern hands-on approach supported extensively by national and international industry giants.

The research will commence during the second quarter of 2006, with the aim of expanding into a full scale self-sufficient manufacturing process facility during a five year period. During this period further funding will be solicited and the international cooperation strengthened.

Source: The Swedish Research Council

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