



Supporting the Contribution of Higher Education Institutions to Regional Development

Peer Review Report

Jutland-Funen in Denmark

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background: OECD/IMHE review

This review of Jutland-Funen in Western Denmark is part of the OECD/IMHE project entitled Supporting the Contribution of Higher Education Institutions to Regional Development which engages 14 regions throughout 12 countries in 2005-2006. The IMHE thematic review project was launched as a response to a multiplicity of initiatives across OECD countries to mobilise higher education in support of regional development. The aim was to synthesise this experience into a coherent body of policy and practice to guide higher education institutions and regional and national governments. At the same time, the IMHE project was designed to assist with capacity building in each country/region through providing an opportunity for dialogue between HEIs and regional stakeholders and clarifying the roles and responsibilities.

Review process

The Peer Review drew on a self-evaluation process guided by an OECD template. This asked HEIs to critically evaluate with their regional partners and in the context of national higher education and regional policies how effective they were in contributing to the development of their regions. Key aspects of the self evaluation related to: the contribution of research to regional innovation; the role of teaching and learning in the development of human capital; the contribution to social, cultural and environmental development and the role of the HEIs in building regional capacity to act in an increasingly competitive global economy.

The self-evaluation process was initiated and led by the Aalborg University with participation and part financing from the three other

Jutland-Funen research universities - The University of Aarhus, The Aarhus School of Business, and The University of Southern Denmark - as well as the Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences (DIAS).

The OECD review visit took place in February 2006. The Peer Review Team - John Rushforth (UK), Peter Arbo (NO), Jakob Vestergaard (DK), and Jaana Puukka (OECD) - met more than 60 senior people, including the representatives from three ministries (Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation; Ministry of Education; and Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries), key regional stakeholders, and universities and DIAS.

Region: Jutland-Funen

The main challenge for Jutland-Funen is to strengthen its position in the global knowledge economy and to compensate for the pull effect of the Copenhagen metropolitan area. There has been a rapid shift to a service and information economy. Still, in comparison to the capital region, Jutland-Funen remains more dependent on traditional industries and agriculture and with fewer research-oriented high tech companies. The east-west polarisation for Denmark in terms of knowledge and skills is paralleled by a similar divide within Jutland-Funen. The city regions with universities are growing whereas the western and northern parts of Jutland are lagging behind.

Jutland-Funen consists of eight counties and 173 municipalities. It has no official position in the Danish governance structures but has been brought together by Jutland-Funen business development cooperation. With the local government reform, the existing counties in Jutland-Funen will be replaced by three regions, which will retain the responsibility for regional planning and the development of industry and labour with the support from Regional Growth Forums. The Regional Growth Forums have the potential to become significant entities, with capacity to influence development and engagement of the HEIs. This opportunity can be maximised if the Forums are focussed in their choice of priorities and inclusive in the way they work with their partners.

Universities' contribution to region building

The Jutland-Funen universities differ in history, size, profile and scope. They all articulate a desire to implement regional engagement strategies, but there is variety in their focus and implementation. The regional orientation is strongest with the youngest universities, the University of Southern Denmark and Aalborg University.

Jutland-Funen benefits from its diverse set of HE institutions, a series of networks and a determination to compete, both nationally and globally. There are a number of good practice examples - for instance the Alexandra Institute in Aarhus, problem-based learning at Aalborg, the Robocluster supported by the University of Southern Denmark, and Novi Science Park in Aalborg, and the TCM Denmark initiative in Funen - but no effective regional infrastructure to ensure coordination of these efforts.

Regional activities of the universities and DIAS are often decentralised and activity or project based. They appear to be organically developing with little systematic planning and management and are supported by a combination of different funding streams. In

most cases they are geared towards the respective sub-regions, rather than Jutland-Funen as a whole. There is also a strong focus on science and technology based cluster development and business related competitiveness whereas the long-term contribution to community development and cultural change are understated.

Government

The Danish University Act has designated a third task for the universities, but no significant funding stream has been allocated to support this task. While the incentive structure appears insufficient, there is a strong focus on rewarding academic excellence and competence. This will enhance the likelihood of further concentration in the Copenhagen area and under-optimal use of resources elsewhere. The government's vision is to make Denmark a leading knowledge society. The main risk is that the scope and pace of reform are so significant that higher education institutions are overwhelmed or become bogged down by a planning blight that reduces their ability to compete. The key to mitigating this risk is to implement consistent policies based on robust evidence and supported with proper funding.

The Peer Review Team's key recommendations

The contribution of higher education to the region can be further developed if all partners are able to:

- Develop region-wide shared strategies and construct a systematic infrastructure for regional collaboration.
- Improve incentive structures at the national and institutional levels to support the regional engagement of the higher education institutions and their staff.
- Continue to reduce the burden of regulation that is placed on higher education institutions.
- Enhance the regional innovation systems.
- Reduce the restrictions on the financing of public-private partnerships.