



Supporting the Contribution of Higher Education Institutions to Regional Development

Peer Review Report

The Øresund Science Region: A cross-border partnership between Denmark and Sweden

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June 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background: OECD/IMHE review

This review of the Øresund Region is part of the OECD/IMHE programme entitled Supporting the Contribution of Higher Education Institutions to Regional Development. The programme includes 14 regions and their higher education institutions from 12 countries. 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 respective roles and responsibilities.

Review process

This review drew on a self-evaluation process initiated and led by the Øresund University, a voluntary organisation of 14 higher education institutions. The OECD review visit took place in December 2005. The Peer Review Team (PRT), under the leadership of Professor Steve Garlick (Australia), had around 25 meetings with more than 30 organisations.

The Øresund Region and the Øresund University

Øresund is a cross-boarder region between Sweden and Denmark comprising the Skåne county and Greater Copenhagen and three rural counties. It has a population of more than 3.5 million that is growing at a rate more quickly than the rest of both Sweden and Denmark. The Øresund Region includes some of the most advanced and most depressed areas in Denmark and Sweden, and the gap is increasing.

The Øresund University aims to make the region into one of Europe's foremost centres for higher education, knowledge production and knowledge transfer; to create a world leading science region, and to increase cross-border integration. The region ranks third behind London and Paris in biotechnological and medical research. It also has strengths in ICT, food processing and environmental technologies. These high-tech fields are sources of international competitive advantage, but represent only a part of the industrial activity. A large part of the economy is based on traditional, low-tech activities.

Positive development...

The Øresund University and the stakeholders involved in the Øresund Science Region have made progress in constructing a bottom-up cross-border science region with the objective of being internationally competitive. The project is unique because of leadership in the project by higher education, the lack of national government intervention, and the role of the platforms in providing a coordinating link between the HEIs and the community. It is innovative because it involves regional collaboration among HEIs, which is unusual when HEI policies advocate individual institutions being internationally competitive.

The Peer Review Team was impressed with the leadership shown by the Øresund University to be the facilitator in the cross-border initiative, demonstrating that collaboration at the regional scale can be effective in an intensely competitive environment. The PRT was convinced that the Øresund Science Region was fundamentally more than a collective branding exercise taking advantage of the new fixed link and that the region had the potential to be a significant global motor built on science, innovation and enterprise. This leadership could be a demonstration to other universities internationally as to the significant role HEIs can play in the collaborative processes required for effective cross-national regional development globally. The Øresund Region has therefore potential to become a significant motor for the two nations involved, and also a demonstration to other nations and their regions as to what can be achieved.

...but more work is needed

The Øresund University has successfully built a partnership network. There is a need to make these partnerships more inclusive and operational in a practical sense in order to achieve the region's competitiveness objectives and to realise the full potential of the region's human capital. This will require, for example, greater involvement with SMEs, low and medium technology firms, the social, cultural and environmental elements of the community and attention to some of the more peripheral communities in the region.

Although both businesses and public organisations in the region have organised a variety of cross-border associations, there is generally a lack of involvement of civil society organisations in cross-Øresund activities. In the next phase, the project should be targeted towards community building and grounded in the lives of the citizens of Øresund. It needs to reach out to the community through a range of public access initiatives. There is a need to consider not just high level research and high tech industry, but also the design and delivery of services, culture and the environment, the plight of those at the margins of society, low and medium tech industry and other areas of education that are important in building stocks of human capital.

The underpinning strategic planning framework for the Øresund Science Region project needs to embrace dimensions of breadth and depth in its stakeholder integration process and to ensure regular progress evaluation involves these quarters of the region. A failure to put mechanisms in place to achieve this will cause the project to remain elitist and will prevent it from fulfilling its potential.

Strengthen collaborative arrangements

To strengthen collaborative arrangements to boost Øresund regional development outcomes, the PRT recommends the following:

- Integrate the partner HEIs in the Øresund University at operational levels below university leadership, particularly in terms of the design and delivery of teaching and learning programs, undertaking research projects, innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives, marketing and promotion, and staff employment and performance.
- Enhance the collaboration and integration amongst stakeholders within the Øresund Science Region, particularly in terms of business access and R&D opportunities.
- Support the platforms to build up their capacity to become a cross-sectoral and cross-disciplinary linking mechanism in the region.
- Engage students in the region building through internships, teaching and research projects. Enhance student mobility across institutions by supporting student travelling costs.
- Combine the local and regional governments and their various areas of responsibility to have an Øresund region focus as well as a focus on their own specific areas of responsibility.
- Integrate environmental, social and cultural objectives into the science region programme to give a more robust basis for the growth. Support the relevant platforms in this task.

Remove impediments

To remove the impediments, the PRT recommends the following:

- Encourage an intergovernmental agreement between the two national governments that recognise the requirements of the Øresund Science region as a cross-border place of special significance and sees the need for harmonisation of current policy differences impeding cross-border development.
- Reduce undue reliance on outside project funding mechanisms. Create a sustainable endogenous source of funding to progress the regional agenda.
- Improve joint marketing and promotion by all parties of the Øresund Science Region.
- Support the necessary cultural change that: (a) recognises the importance of realising enterprising human capital across all areas relevant to the future growth directions of the Øresund Science Region, alongside elite-based innovation; and (b) a culture that good regional outcomes can revolve around international connectivity.