



Globally Competitive, Locally Engaged Higher Education and Regions

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**PROVINCIAL UNIVERSITY OF LAPLAND: ENHANCING HUMAN CAPITAL AND
SUPPORTING INNOVATION IN A SPARSELY POPULATED REMOTE REGION**

by

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Abstract

In 2002, four HEIs established a consortium named *Provincial University of Lapland* with the purpose of supporting the development of the region, widening access to higher education, increasing collaboration between educational institutions and fostering innovation. The consortium provides degree and non-degree education. *Provincial University of Lapland* reaches out to remote communities in Lapland with the help of a combination of distance learning and contact education. It takes advantage of already existing facilities in the four sub-regions. It has a broad portfolio that includes open education, professional development courses, expert and R&D services as well as estimation and evaluation services. Provision of services is based on regional needs that focus on upgrading the tourism industry. Learning and development needs have been mapped in each of the four sub-regions in collaboration with a wide range of public and private stakeholders. The HEIs are engaged in strategy development and implementation at the regional and sub-regional levels. Similar initiatives, spurred by the Finnish Ministry of Education, have emerged in other regions. They all take advantage of the extensive adult education framework of HEIs and folk high schools.

Introduction

Lapland

Lapland is the biggest and northernmost province in Finland. Its 98,947 square kilometres cover almost one third of Finland's land area. It is the most sparsely populated province in Finland, with a population density of only 2 persons per square kilometre (in 2003). The population is estimated to decrease to 171,000 by 2020. This fact will have a major impact on many sectors in the province.

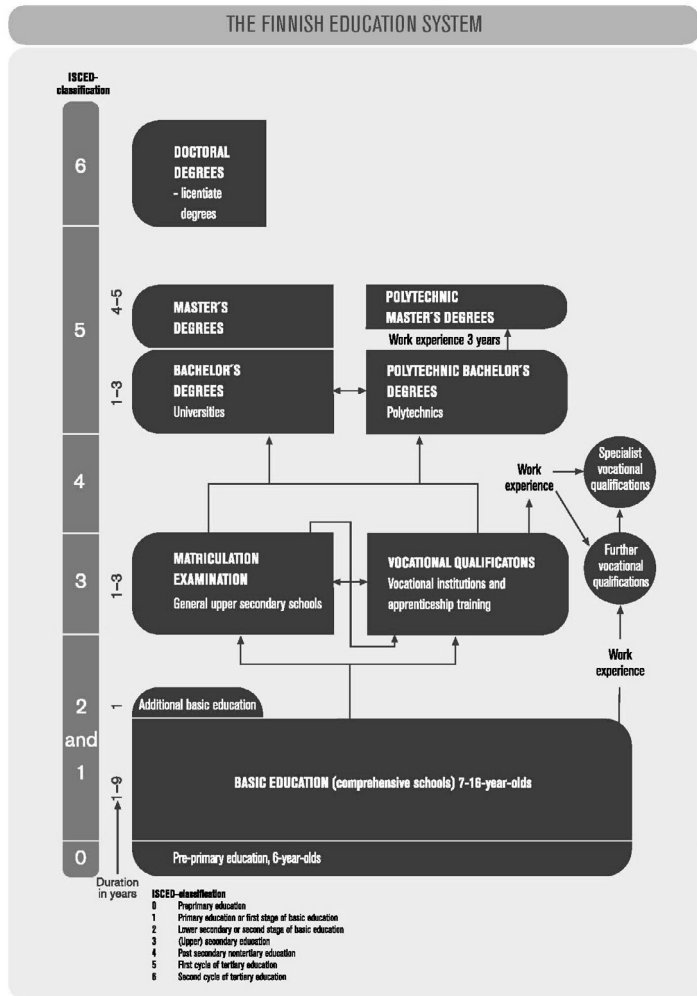
Lapland is a region of great natural beauty and diversity. It was and still is the last wilderness in Europe and as such it draws increasing numbers of tourists, who come to experience nature and get a taste of the local culture. Finland has always been a multicultural country with several distinct cultures within its borders. The best known cultural groups in Finland are the Finns, the Swedes and the Sami. The Sami are an indigenous people of northern Europe. Sami communities also suffer from the depopulation of Lapland. Because of the different languages and the declining number of students living in the sparsely populated areas outside the school centres like Rovaniemi and Kemi-Tornio, education is especially difficult to organize.

The province of Lapland consists of six sub-regions, which in turn consist of a few municipalities. The sub-regions are regional entities that have been constituted on the basis of intermunicipal collaboration and commutation. They also act as the basic units of distribution of regional EU subsidies (LAU 1 level, formerly NUTS 4)

The higher education system in Finland

The system of higher education in Finland consists of two parallel sectors: polytechnics (universities of applied sciences) and academic universities. The academic universities are characterized by scientific research and the topmost level of teaching based on the results of the research. The polytechnics (universities of applied sciences), on the other hand, are focused on work life and its demands for high-quality vocational proficiency.

Figure 1. Higher education in Finland



In developing Finnish higher education, co-operation between academic universities and polytechnics (universities of applied sciences) is bound to increase and intensify. The Ministry of Education is encouraging this co-operation and has for example required HEIs to draft joint regional strategies. The Provincial University of Lapland is one form of co-operation in this development and has been sponsored by the ministry.

What is a provincial university?

A provincial university is a co-operative network between the higher education institutions in a province and representatives of a sub-region, for example. By intensifying co-operation a provincial university adds both educational and R&D services, and their impact, in a region. It also brings educational possibilities and services offered by the universities to the sub-regions, close to the people, enterprises, communities and officials in the public sector. With the help of systematic regional co-operation (objectives, planning, reporting and method development) the HEIs are striving to achieve effective use of resources together with regional coverage and influence.

A provincial university is not a physical institution or organization, but a network that assembles the authorities that deal with higher education and R&D services in a sub-region. In order to serve the sub-region, these authorities design the university education, provide the needed resources and co-ordinate implementation via various operators.

The guideline for the operation of a provincial university consortium is region orientation. The network of universities offers education and research to satisfy the demands of the adult population and commerce in a region. And the education is planned according to the needs of the sub-region.

A provincial university brings additional value to the impact that the university has on a region. The additional value is produced by means of open education offered by both traditional universities and universities of applied sciences, vocational continuing education, degree programmes and research and expert services. How and to what extent the educational scheme of the provincial university is realized depends on the region, its operators and objectives. Several principles are united in the concept of the provincial university: lifelong learning, a network-based operating model, regional service and interaction (based on the third mission of the universities) (Koski 2006).

Background and objectives of the Provincial University of Lapland

The Provincial University of Lapland is a network of professionals from the University of Lapland, two polytechnics (Rovaniemi and Kemi-Tornio Universities of Applied Sciences), the Summer University of Lapland and the sub-regions of Lapland, and its objective is balanced development of the province. It is a new way of enhancing competence in individuals, communities and regions. The operational background of the provincial university includes the regional responsibilities of the universities, divergent needs in different parts of the sub-region and fast structural changes. The six sub-regions of Lapland differ from each other as far as their aims, structures and stages of development are concerned, and this has been taken into consideration in the development of the model of the provincial university. The competence of the network has been channelled to support the aims of the industrial policies of the sub-regions. Also, the level of education has to be raised in industries that are central to the viability and development of the sub-regions.

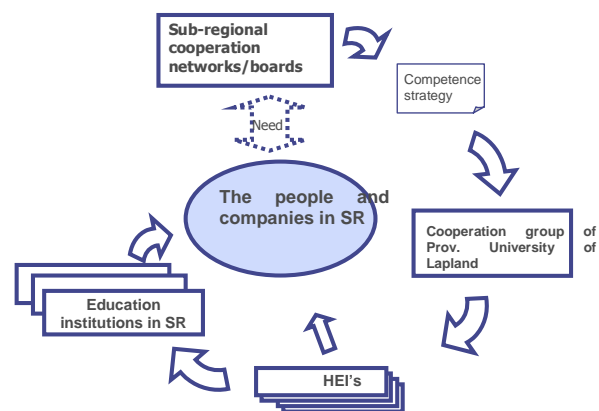
One of the most important objectives of the provincial university is to bring education and research services closer to the people of Lapland. In practice this means utilizing information technology and virtual universities or polytechnics. The educational formats of the Provincial University of Lapland are open education in academic universities and polytechnics, vocational

continuing education and degree programmes. Once the groundwork of competence in the sub-regions has been strengthened to an adequate level with the help of open university education, the provincial university can, if necessary, organize regional degree programmes or parts of them. The programmes can lead to either a Bachelor's degree or a Master's degree. The variety of methods in the repertoire of the provincial university includes R&D work, co-operation in the implementation of projects and other professional assistance that supports the region.

Operating model of the Provincial University of Lapland

A special *co-operation body* has been founded in each sub-region. It includes representatives from the region's industrial and educational sectors, non-formal educational institutes, other local educational organizations, employment agencies and regional enterprises – as well as from the University of Lapland, the Kemi-Tornio and Rovaniemi Universities of Applied Sciences and the Summer University of Lapland. The mission of these sub-regional networks is to map both the educational needs and the objects of research / product development that support the industrial and commercial objectives of the area. The objectives of the provincial university are assembled to form a *competence strategy* in each sub-region. In addition, the co-operation bodies launch educational projects, take care of practical educational arrangements in the area and evaluate their effects on the sub-regions.

Figure 2. Operating model of the Provincial University of Lapland



The *co-operation group*, consisting of representatives from the higher education institutions, negotiates the services that meet the demands of the sub-regions. It maintains the Provincial University of Lapland portal, which contains information on available education and on-line support services. The co-operation group also prepares new kinds of educational models, promotes the development of mutual education organized by several educational institutions and gathers experience from sub-regional co-operation and its impact.

The Provincial University of Lapland needs regional organizers of education and information services with their learning environments. A large part of the degree programmes serving the sub-regions are organized in co-operation with local vocational and liberal adult education. Local groups assemble in the premises of either vocational schools or upper secondary schools. In addition, university students also get help from the information services of public libraries.

Additional value produced by the operating model

The role that the Provincial University of Lapland has of directing and developing the operations of local universities clearly produces additional value compared with former working methods. In the following is a list of additional values gained by operating according to the central functional methods and principles:

Regional education and development are based on the needs of the sub-regions

On the regional level, need-oriented working methods ensure that the universities support local development organizations, providers of public services and enterprises by providing new professionals and developing research. For the locals, need-oriented working methods mean education that ensures employment in their own region.

Long-term planning of education and R&D

Long-term planning increases the predictability of operation and the time for preparation for the benefit of the universities, regional co-operation operators and assisting and financing agencies.

Combining resources and contributions

The operating model combines the activities and special know-how of the different parties and thereby ensures the entity of competence that is needed.

Ensuring the regional activity of HEIs

The Provincial University of Lapland strengthens regional significance in the operation of Lappish higher education institutions (the so-called third mission). As an example, the provincial university, which was started as a project, was established in the beginning of 2006.

Results and influence of operation

The Provincial University of Lapland is now in the phase of implementing the competence strategies. At the moment there are eight degree programmes in operation in the province, which are in compliance with the objectives of the provincial university and implemented by a vocational school or university. Degree education is implemented in each sub-region of Lapland. It is being organized in several ways: education offered to one open education group in one municipality, multipoint teaching that serves several groups in several municipalities, and interactive on-line teaching that enables individual participation. The supply of open education has been increased in the regions, and alongside with open education courses at traditional universities, courses can be chosen at the universities of applied sciences, as well. The accessibility of education has been improved by developing the information services and technology needed in distance learning and teaching, by producing both mutual study guides and an education portal for distance learners ([www.maakuntakorkeakoulu.fi/provincial university of lapland](http://www.maakuntakorkeakoulu.fi/provincial%20university%20of%20lapland)) and by means of tuition subventions.

Degree education has been designed to support the key industries in the sub-regions in accordance with local competence strategies. The sub-regional degree programmes cover tourism (both academic and polytechnic levels), health care, business competence and administration, and IT. Parts of the degree programmes are also available as open university education, which widens the target group and influence of education.

According to a survey made of the Provincial University of Lapland, the greatest influence can be seen at the national and provincial levels. As a national pilot project the Provincial University of Lapland has awakened considerable interest, says the survey, and the image of both the project with its different parties and the whole province has been enhanced. The survey regards the provincial university experiments, which have been started around Finland and which each have a slightly different contentual and structural emphasis, as the most concrete modes of influence. At the provincial level the Provincial University of Lapland, as a producer of education and research, is considered one of the developers of the area (Martikainen 2005).

The impact that the Provincial University of Lapland has had at the provincial and individual levels is apparent in the improvement of regional education possibilities, people's eagerness to educate themselves as a result, co-operation both inside the province and with the universities, and the general rise in the level of competence. What is regarded as a significant result is the influence that education has had on employment. According to the survey, nearly everyone who had attended degree education believed that they would find work, especially in their own region. The survey states that, in the light of the identified impacts, the operation of the Provincial University of Lapland can be considered to strengthen the realization of educational and social equality (Martikainen 2005).

Things to be taken into consideration when starting

In establishing the Provincial University of Lapland we have come across several delays in addition to successes and encouragements. The delays have occurred when implementing and widening the new concept and working methods. Some of the most challenging have been:

The needs of the sub-regions

Defining the common orientation and needs of a sub-region is not always easy. Because the municipalities differ from each other in their history, industrial structure and future expectations, the operation of the provincial university must be planned accordingly.

Slowness

In order to be efficient and influential, university education requires decisions and actions from several parallel but individual organizations. The provincial university, which acts as a broker, needs to practise patience and diplomacy. Too many ships to turn...almost!

R&D needs and supply

Significantly small enterprises, which are common in Lapland, are not accustomed to getting support from higher education institutions or research surveys when developing their operations. To reach them and convince them of the benefits of co-operation requires continuous, innovative development. All HEI branches are not interested in or familiar with off-campus R&D activities, either.

The near future of the Provincial University of Lapland

When the basic tasks (continuous interaction, open education and degree education) have become regular, the emphasis will be placed on R&D activities in the future. What will be central when developing the provincial university are innovative experiments connected to the delivery of research competence, finding target companies and financing.

Directed by the Provincial University of Lapland and utilizing its experiences, the provincial university model will be adopted in throughout northern Finland. Thus, the higher education networks serving one half of Finland would unite two universities and five universities of applied sciences.

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