

The regional role of higher education institutions in the Nordic countries

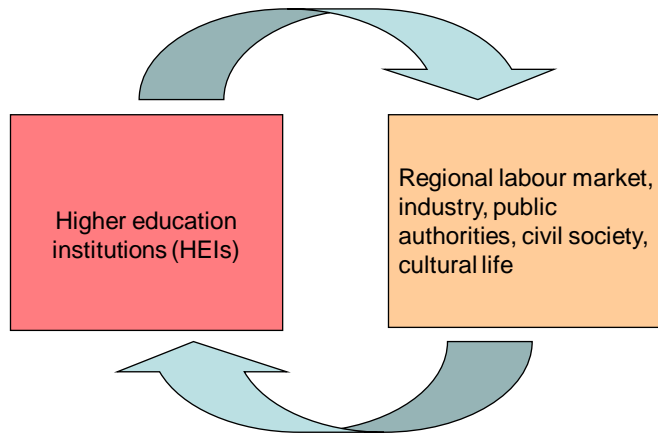
Peter Arbo



Point of departure

- Studied the regional impacts of the University of Tromsø
- Jan-Evert Nilsson et al. (2004): *The role of universities in regional innovation systems – a Nordic perspective*. Copenhagen: CBS Press
- The OECD project on supporting the regional role of higher education institutions 2004-2007 (project task group)
- Peter Arbo & Paul Benneworth (2007): *Understanding the regional role of higher education institutions: A literature review*, OECD Education Working Paper No. 9
- Member of the Government Commission for Higher Education in Norway (2006-2008): NOU 2008:3 Sett under ett. Ny struktur i høyere utdanning
- Member of the University Board in Tromsø 2004-2008

Focus: Interaction



3

No obvious links

- Universities are located *in* cities and regions but do not exist *for* them
- Both research and teaching have always claimed to have a universalistic character
- The universities and new schools of applied sciences became modern state institutions in the 19th century
- Transformed from elite institutions to a system of mass education during the 20th century
- An increasing universalisation of higher education
 - Spread of universities and university colleges
 - Expansion of enrolments
 - Expansion of scope of teaching and research
 - International harmonisation and standardisation

4

Shifting external demands

- The 1960s: Equal opportunities and access to higher education; building the welfare state
- The 1980s: Research-based innovation and high tech companies; the globalising knowledge economy
- Today: Widening of mission: Environmental risks, resource scarcity, demographic ageing, social exclusion
- Tasks: Teaching, research, knowledge exchange, entrepreneurship, community services
- Increasing number of stakeholders: Multiversities

5

Regional impacts

- 1) Income/demand-side effect
- 2) Supply-side effect
- 3) Magnet effect
- 4) Commercialisation effect
- 5) Network effect
- 6) Socio-cultural effect
- 7) Political voice effect
- 8) Image effect

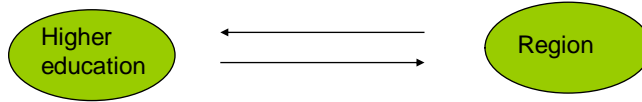
In general: The educational function is the most important one

The effects and their geographical scope depend on:

- The size, profile, quality and orientation of the institutions
- The size of the host city and region
- The structure and capabilities of the regional industry
- The political-administrative system
- The extent of cross-institutional co-ordination and leadership

6

Mutual dependence



- Recruitment of students
- Job prospects for graduates
- Relevance of education and training
- Teaching, student projects and practice
- Research issues, data and equipment
- Part of a knowledge-rich environment
- External revenue
- Political support
- Infrastructure, services and amenities
- The attractiveness of places

- Access to qualified personnel and lifelong learning
- Workplaces for highly educated people
- Bridgeheads to the international academic world
- Resource bases of people, skills and knowledge
- Regional rallying points
- Libraries, laboratories and other facilities
- Societal debates and decision-making
- Social and cultural events
- The attractiveness of places

7

Policy initiatives

Education
 Problem-based and interactive learning, dialogue with employers on curricula, guest lecturers, career counselling, flexible and distant education, business PhDs

Governance
 Strategic capacity, transparency, performance indicators, contracts, quasi-markets

Knowledge exchange
 New networks, partnerships, dedicated units, student placements, mobility programmes

Research
 Contract research, joint research centres, industrial sponsorship, R&D subsidies or tax deduction schemes

Community services
 A variety of collaborative projects (festivals, urban regeneration, social assistance, action research, etc.)

Entrepreneurship
 Research parks, incubators, seed capital funds, new courses, TTOs, management of IPR

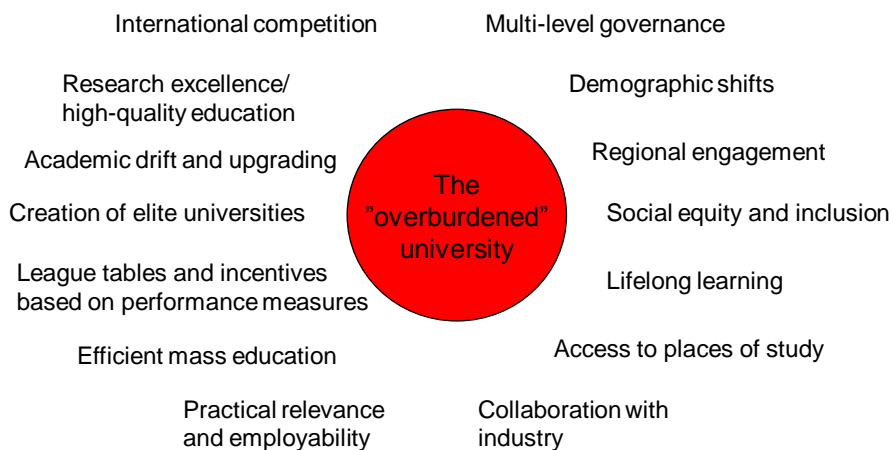
8

Strengthening regional engagement

- Not a "third stream" or "add-on" activity, but an integral part of teaching and research
- Not a task for individual enthusiasts only, but an institutional responsibility
- Not disqualifying academically, but an activity with its own merit and reward
- Not short-term and fragmented support, but long-term and coherent measures
- Not a narrow policy of higher education, but linked to a comprehensive and regionally differentiated development policy

9

Challenges and dilemmas



10

Vicious and virtuous circles

Rural areas

- Depopulation
- Stagnant economy
- Few job opportunities for graduates
- Lack of funding
- General service institutions
- Desperately seeking students
- Low academic standing and reputation

Metropolitan areas

- Increasing population
- Prosperous economy
- A high density of knowledge-intensive enterprises
- Collaboration with resourceful partners
- Growing revenues
- Select the best students
- High academic standing and reputation

11

Balancing conflicting demands

- Robust research communities and high-quality education are prerequisites for regional development
- There is a need for consolidation and better division of labour within university consortia
- More flexible and decentralised education
- Extended research collaboration with private and public partners aiming at knowledge complementarities
- Attention to intermediaries and boundary spanners
- Keep the contribution to regional development high on the policy agenda
- Require regional strategies and secure a basic funding of regional engagement

12

Conclusions

- Higher education institutions are important nodes in regional development, but they are not the key drivers of regional innovation
- The conditions for interaction are shaped by the environments in which the institutions are embedded
- Management of the institutions implies managing diversity and a large number of stakeholders
- There are many good examples and lessons to be learned from the Nordic countries
- To survive and flourish, the institutions must become more entrepreneurial, but they should not be seen as instruments for everything or only for one single purpose