

## **Session 5: Workshop 4**

**Title:** The Resurgence of Regional Governments (Universities and the ‘New Regionalism’)

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### ***The Context/Definitions of ‘new regionalism’***

The focus of this presentation was on ‘sub-state’ regions, and specifically the impact of lower tiers of government within states on universities. Global regions (EU, ASEAN, NAFTA, etc) are, in part, co-operative groups of states that have come about in response to globalisation. Globalisation imposes limits on central states, national governments and parliaments, especially in terms of economic/social policy interventionism; and in response we have seen the emergence of new structures of regional government - particularly to allow for the development of the regional economy within global economic flows (‘new regionalism’). This ‘new regionalism’ relates to the nurturing and maximising of ‘endogenous’ potential in resources and know-how possessed by a region, and offers local incentives (cultural, environmental, educational) to attract global capital.

### ***The ‘Learning Region’ and the role of universities***

The concept of the ‘learning region’ is where regional economic competitiveness is influenced by the transformation of knowledge and information into learning. Universities are naturally an integral part of the infrastructure of knowledge and learning in modern societies, figuring prominently in research on regionalism and the learning region. Several reasons underlie the relevance of universities in this scenario:

- Innovation, and the commercial application thereof, contributes to regional ‘endogenous’ potential
- Quality of human capital - vocational and abstract skills are taught and retained by the region
- Magnets for inward investment – a university’s reputation for R&D or technology transfer can attract capital
- Collective good - e.g. sport/cultural facilities, often also community resources. The ‘Social capital’ that is generated by a university can help to bind a community.

### ***Regional economic development and the role of universities; disjunctions in regional vision and practice***

Universities are consequently of some importance in the economic development strategies of regional governments. New regionalism means a new set of demands for the universities: they become 'co-responsible' for a regional economy's success; and some universities are thus required to adjust to different targets. Various disjunctions exist, though, between the theoretical role of universities in the 'learning region' and the actual practice of developing and implementing a regional vision:

- 1) The technology transfer challenge analogy: as is the case with some theoretical research break-throughs which are not practically realised, so there has been a failure to translate theoretical advances in conceptualising 'learning regions' into practice for the universities themselves. Much development effort is still necessary in order to relate the university's role in a learning region to actual practical achievement.
- 2) University missions are often defined as national/international/global rather than regional or local; and it takes time to change these.
- 3) Academic loyalty is more often to peers in a discipline rather than to a region or even an institution. It is also necessary to address ways of helping the non-academic to embrace regional issues.
- 4) Current incentive structures are often weighted to national or international rather than regional values (e.g. the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK). More financial incentives are needed to encourage universities to think regionally.
- 5) Competition and co-operation: universities rarely work together on issues of a specifically regional nature.
- 6) Lack of reliable methodology for demonstrating the extent and nature of universities' identifiable contribution to regional economy: i.e. the real impact of universities regionally (for instance, the wider civic value of a university's cultural/civic facilities, the benefits of developing human resources and retaining graduates with the region etc)

### ***Conclusion***

Without such measures, the problem of reorientation to new regional missions remains; similarly, regional governments will be limited in benefiting from the universities for their regions.

### **Discussion**

While the presentation pointed to the importance on the one hand of recognising the role that universities have to play in regional economic development and on the other hand to the difficulties of realising this role in practice, the discussion which followed raised a further dimension: that of the discrepancy between the impact and value of regionalism in developed and developing countries. In the latter, local, national or regional political imperatives may be more persuasive than economic considerations, and these powerful political influences often impact on a university's autonomy. Yet

within that very context it is of particular relevance that universities seek to co-operate with each other, to share resources and/or form partnerships (with both the public and the private sector).

It was also pointed out that new regionalism offers the opportunity to develop “bottom up” rather than “top down” strategies. Benefits can be derived from bringing together, for instance, government agencies, the private sector and universities with a view to working together towards common aims. In this way better use can be made of resources, and marketing strategies can be devised to demonstrate that a particular region is an attractive place in which to do business.

Although the core of the discussion focused on issues related to the use of intellectual resources to regional effect, it led also to an airing of what is a real problem in many developing countries: whether to publish scholarly papers in local or international academic journals. Professor Jeffery’s response suggested that the two were not necessarily incompatible: he argued that the same research could be articulated/presented in different formats and published in both so that its value and impact on local or regional needs would not be lost while it would also claim the prestige - and criticism - that derives from appearance in a distinguished journal.

