

PASCAL Report to the Puglia Region

PURE Work 2009-2010

A. Distinctive and unique features of the Puglia Region

An important lesson from the PURE project is the individual and special character of each region. Without understanding this it is hard to learn from other regions, and to use what fits your unique circumstances. What are the key features of Regione Puglia?

Puglia is a fully and democratically recognised, empowered and managed southern Italian region. Some PURE regions lack this status and authority. The Administration is strong and purposeful, with policies based in communally-oriented values. It was re-elected in 2010. The time taken for the new Administration to settle down has caused some delay in following through the work of PURE.

Puglia's purposes distinguish it from most other Italian regions. The difference from the North is accentuated. What is seen as a 'problem of under-development' in the South is however also a strength in Puglia. Traditional ways and wisdom are gaining value in a changing and environmentally stressed world.

The region is the base for the Italian Learning Cities Association, an active and significant national community-based NGO dedicated to lifelong learning and learning communities. This strengthens the often neglected social and community side of development.

Puglia is the strongest PURE region in terms of active citizen participation and transparency in governance, and one where government-NGO partnership is most promising. Puglia's PURE Conference "Learning Communities: new relationships between university and local authorities based on participation", in May 2010, was an outstanding demonstration of the capacity to bring government, community and academic stakeholders together. These are great and distinctive strengths.

Difficulties come mainly from national level, and traditions of governance, including the character and governance of universities in Italy. Faculties and 'god-professors' remain powerful. There is little lay presence in the governance of universities. Ideas of engagement and 'third mission' are unfamiliar.

There is some freedom to develop business partnerships with external stakeholders, and to support innovation and spin-off arising from academic R&D; but legislative changes like budgets are controlled nationally. Despite these obstacles and the absence of entrepreneurial traditions, there is room to move, using assets and forces within the region through which engagement can still grow.

B. Formal and informal means of engagement

Much has been achieved in Regione Puglia through PURE, despite the demands and problems caused by the global economic climate, its effects on the region, and other political difficulties. The 2009 Action Plan set out many things that have since been achieved, as the Group visiting in May 2010 could see.

The energy and support of the regional administration and of the Learning Cities Association have helped the universities to start realising what engagement means and why it matters. In early 2009 the visiting group found indifference, scepticism, and only a little real interest in the idea that universities should be involved in the development of their regions, although some individuals were keen.

A year later there was a big change of attitude and much more evidence of activity arising, especially in the key 'flagship' University of Bari. The newer and more innovative universities showed real enthusiasm, a strong understanding of what engagement means and why it matters, and examples of important local-regional work in progress. The participation of universities at Casamassima is a good foundation for future partnership.

Creating and learning to use the means of working together may be invisible; but it is essential for engaging usefully. There is evident progress within the universities since Regionale Puglia joined PURE. The number and quality of informal and unofficial external partnership activities by individuals and small groups has increased and gained in confidence.

At a formal and official level, several universities are now explicitly recognising and committing to forms of engagement. It should be possible to have missions and plans widened to make this work more central, and more formally recognised and rewarded. PURE has been used well to develop contacts and conversations that can now be the basis for growing *systems* of engagement based on formal agreements.

Communalism is a great strength and a key to regional culture, where governments are looked on with some scepticism. It may be time to add formal agreements to the strong informal networking that produces results. The mixture of open exchange with persisting suspicion at Casamassima supports this judgement.

The region-HEI relationship has been strengthened. It can now be consolidated. If it becomes embedded it should be able to survive changes to the political and university leadership that have been important in making it possible.

Within the PURE project, the region successfully undertook particular practical projects. More can be started. These will help more sustainable engagement as well as being of value themselves. Continuing productive success will build a platform for working together more deeply in the future.

C. Benefits and prospective future gains from international networking

The benchmarking tools for PURE universities and regions have proved valuable for taking stock, and for monitoring and enhancing progress. This has nothing to do with competitive comparison with other regions and institutions. However, collaboration within the PURE network can help the region to develop better.

Universities in PURE regions that benchmarked early found this useful for seeing what they were and were not doing well. This provides guidance for planning future provision according to need and demand. When regions also benchmark themselves, the two 'pictures' can be brought together. This helps joint planning to avoid wasteful duplication between universities.

Puglia was slow to take an interest in benchmarking, and universities were very reluctant in 2009. In 2010 a dramatic change had occurred. Benchmarking was used and universities, notably the 'naturally conservative' University of Bari, used the tool and found it valuable. It was experienced as almost a 'road to Damascus' experience. If the universities, Bari especially, can sustain momentum, the benefits will be important.

High aspirations were set by the region when it agreed to join PURE. Some were for things that take 5-10 years to achieve in full. One Swedish PURE region, Varmland, has been actively committed to building engagement for almost ten years and remains in PURE, recognising how important and slow the process of learning-and-doing is.

It was felt after a few months in Puglia that little progress was being made in grasping and acting on the practical meaning of the concept of the learning region. Engagement was unfamiliar and 'third mission' is not familiar to Italian universities. Some progress has been made in seeing what these things mean in practical ways, and how they can now be brought to fruition.

Community-based NGO work is a force for developing understanding and practice. The orientation and commitment of the regional administration remains important. It will greatly assist Regione Puglia to continue as an active member of both PASCAL and the PURE project. This will enable the region to see where it is doing well, to get specialised advice, to learn and try out other approaches, and to be part of a mutually supportive set of regions and universities having similar agendas, such as are not yet available within Italy.

D. Getting more value from engagement between the region and the universities

What practical steps can be taken, and how can obstacles be overcome? Each partner must keep working out why engagement matters both 'selfishly' and in wider

and longer term way, and what will best assist fruitful engagement. We advise the following:

The region should remain in PASCAL and PURE, and be as active as possible in the different strands of activity. The more different stakeholders in all sectors that can get directly involved in PASCAL activity, visits and exchanges, the greater will be the benefit to Regione Puglia.

As well as providing leadership in a few areas, the region should 'listen in' to all the specialised clusters of PURE. Each one is important to different parties in the region, and all of them to the region as a whole.

As proposed in the 2009 Action Plan, create an effective forum and a mechanism on Regional Development Group (RDG) lines with specialised and maybe province-level sub-groups to set targets and monitor progress.

Use the region benchmarking tool, and put the results together with the benchmarking work done by the universities. See where teaching and research programmes need developing to meet present and emerging regional needs. Through the RDG, work out which specialists in the administration and the universities can share in different special interests and responsibilities to connect within PURE.

If possible, convene (with the Learning Cities Association) another open meeting in 2011 to widen interest and involvement, sustain energy and support future planning.

The universities should benchmark themselves again after 12-18 months to see what change has occurred and what is needed. This should be taken into their central planning. Each university should find ways in which community service and engagement with all kinds of region partners can be better recognised and rewarded for career purposes.

Look for opportunities to make formal agreements at region and province levels for mutual engagement in strategic planning – that is to say, in the university's own governance, and in public sector planning work at region, province and city levels.

Encourage individuals and groups to get involved in 'third mission' engagement, and make the results well known within the university.

Identify national obstacles of a legal and funding kind that make engagement hard or impossible, and lobby together for the necessary changes. PURE can provide advice and examples of problem-solving, and other ways of managing in different systems.

Through PURE and PASCAL, look for universities in other countries with similar purposes and circumstances, and make twinning arrangements of mutual benefit. A good example could be Foggia with Kaposvar in Hungary.

The private sector should look to the universities to develop and apply R&D productively, commercialising through spin-off companies etc. Many forms of partnership for exploitation of innovation are possible even within current legal constraints. With a main focus in science, technology and management, there are also other relevant and useful areas of academic expertise.

Work to make university curricula and research agendas relevant and useful, by joining advisory and planning groups and committees. Make arrangements together for work experience attachments, staff exchanges, useful short post-experience short courses, and joint R&D projects.

The Italian Learning Cities Association should continue to engage with all parties in the region, especially to try to work with all the universities. It must continue the excellent grassroots initiatives that are a strong feature of Puglia. It should be a main source of understanding of 'the learning city and region', and a link to the expertise available in PASCAL.

E. Evidence that the work of PURE will be sustained in the future

The work of many time-bound projects dies with the end of the formal contract. In the case of Puglia, PURE has stimulated new and sustainable linkages, and encouraged some very good projects in key areas like social inclusion, rural communities and economies, transport, green economy and jobs.

For continued development, and the sense of achievement needed to keep going, a new joint action plan for 2011-2013 would provide focus and a time frame. This requires continuing work by the regional forum (RDG). It should include a second round of benchmarking to inform regional and university planning.

Puglia region has much to gain as well as to give as a continuing active member of PURE. This will assist the process of translating the learning region concept into sustainable joint activities. It will reinvigorate the universities in difficult times, as they become increasingly important to, and valued and rewarded by, the different stakeholders in the region.

The visiting PURE Consultative Development Group has suggested writing up some of the good work within Puglia as Good Practice examples for the PURE website (see the RVR2 summary). This is desirable to share lessons and success stories and to promote and profile the region. It will open new exchange learning opportunities internationally, and support further innovation.

Based on its successes already, the region could give an international lead partly through PASCAL in strategies for handling youth unemployment, as well as in tradition-based sustainability and rural regeneration.