



# Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

## PASCAL UNIVERSITIES REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT PROJECT (PURE)

### PURE Briefing Paper No. 2

#### Lessons from the OECD 14 Regions Study 2004-2007

Working meeting on the Implementation of PURE - Workshop 1

#### A. Published sources

Main public sources are the final report:

- Higher Education and Regions: globally competitive, locally engaged, OECD 2007 (the Valencia report) - quite general in its final published form, moving away from the specific findings in the 14 studies;
- a special issue of the IMHE OECD journal Higher Education Management and Policy 20, 2 2008, which derived from work for and at that Conference and reflects much of the learning gained through the project; and
- the 14 projects each produced two regional reviews (known as the SER or self-evaluation review and the peer review report or PRR). These give detailed accounts of each region, as seen from within and by a visiting review team. They were mounted on the OECD website; if they cease to be available there they may be accessed via the Pascal website ([mary.serafim@rmit.edu.au](mailto:mary.serafim@rmit.edu.au)).

The planning and process issues referred to below are not in the main available in the same way. They draw on the experience of developing and managing the 14-regions project and the different case studies, month by month.

#### B. Two types of 'lessons'

There are two broad categories of lessons, or kinds of learning, to be drawn from the project:

- The sources above are authoritative mainly for the **substantive areas** and issues to do with regional development and the roles of the respective parties or stakeholders, in each case region and by generalisation from these, notably in the concluding chapter of the 2007 Valencia report.
- The other broad category concerns how such work is conducted: what **processes** proved most valuable for gaining a better understanding of what works and why, and for learning effectively and practically from comparing with approaches used in other regions, institutions and systems.

These two areas are briefly addressed in the following notes:

- As a basis for discussion at Glasgow 23-24 September 2008, to assist planning and decision-making for the Pascal PURE project.
- To ensure continuity of learning and shared understanding between different projects over time. We begin with the processes used in planning and conducting the project, suggesting lessons for PURE as we proceed.

#### C. Processes, assumptions, planning and management of the 14-regions project

- C.1** The **participants** for the study were conceived of as regions, with their universities (universities in practice, but consistently referred to as HEIs or higher education institutions to avoid exclusivity). The project was co-owned by the Public Governance and Territorial Development and (via IMHE) the Education Divisions of OECD.

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- C.2** In practice much of the interest generated and the **recruitment** was via universities in membership of IMHE. In such cases universities themselves defined and sought to involve 'their region'. Some were clear and strong administrative regions, others less clearly defined or well established. Some approaches were declined as falling too far beyond norms for useful comparison, others because the HEI was unwilling to include other HEIs in 'its region'.
- C.3** The **funding** for each region's participation varied in different proportions: from the region itself, and /or with other stakeholders; to universities individually or in consortia or combination. The **driving energy** to see through the work also varied; mostly it came from university personnel who also undertook the research inquiry; in some cases the regional authority was strongly in the lead.
- C.4 Lessons for PURE?**
- **The identification and involvement of an appropriate regional entity with commitment to offset a too HE-centred and driven approach**
  - **Great flexibility and eclecticism in defining criteria for participation and in responding to diversity of situations in agreeing on partner participation**
  - **Encourage local dialogue and cost-sharing as part of the process of developing local engagement as well as to make the cost manageable for smaller and poorer regions**
  - **Encourage the recognition and active contribution of in-region expertise e.g. in regional studies, especially within any HEI involved in the project.**
- C.5** Clear criteria and a detailed template were developed to manage the project to a standard framework. The regional self-evaluation was to a detailed prescription. However, the resulting SERs actually varied greatly in what they contained and how this was presented. The later 'peer review' was also closely orchestrated within a framework for planning, conduct and reporting. Each 'peer review team' had an OECD (IMHE)-appointed secretariat member and three non-OECD members drawn from universities, with a few from other research and policy analysis bodies.
- C.6** The two reports were kept distinct and web-mounted independently. Regions were allowed to check the draft peer review report for factual accuracy but not to alter matters of interpretation and recommendation. In some cases this 'product control' caused annoyance, a reaction amplified by the OECD-owned analysis and synthesis for the final report.
- C.7** Each regional review was distinct and self-contained, managed in a spokes-of-wheel manner with the OECD administration at the hub. The 'peer' in peer reviews meant non-OECD 'field' personnel, not reviewers drawn reciprocally from within the group of participating regions. Different starting points, levels of expertise and practical logistics also favoured this approach.
- C.8** The comprehensive and detailed template required regions to consider a broad set of issues, but did not always secure closely comparable reports. Nor was it closely enough defined to enable the project to answer the conventional 'social science' critique of case-study approaches. Hard data were not always marshalled in comparable ways. Problematic issues to do with measuring and proving the contribution of universities to development remain.
- C.9** Two powerful forms of learning were realised during the life of the project, rather than planned for:
- One was the effect in some regions of working together to produce the SERs. This sometimes changed the situation, requiring collaboration and forging new in-region partnerships as a result.

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The project thus became an action research and development project, as well as a comparative study.

- The other benefit derived from the need to bring regional representatives together occasionally for professional exchange and dialogue. These events generated much direct region-to-region interest, and a number of spin-off bilateral and multilateral sub-group information exchanges, visits and other activities not 'captured' by the formal review process. They also generated interest within many of the regions to sustain a continuing network for exchange, maybe benchmarking, and monitored co-development, which led to the idea of 'PURE'.

## C.10 Lessons for PURE?

- **The experience of a centralised approach, contrasting with more spontaneous and participatory inter-regional learning, suggests a responsive brokering role on the part of the PURE steering core, rather than a directive managerial one, together with shared responsibility for the nature and ownership of published and other 'outputs' as well for project design, ongoing project monitoring, and development.**
- **The diversity of priority interests across regions, and the advantages of direct inter-regional involvement at every opportunity, point to:**
  - **diversity of focus and content in the work of each region reflecting its particular conditions, state of development, and urgent priority interests** (contracts therefore diverse in focus and in 'deliverables', within a common framework);
  - **decentralised, participatory, adaptable 'network' project management;**
  - **where review procedures and visits are involved, the use wherever possible of reviewers (mentors, experts) from among others taking part within the regional network, rather than 'outsiders', except where the need for particular expertise means looking wider - direct reciprocity of learning and development;**
  - **a strong lead in enhancing effective comparability and in identifying, using and improving tools for data collection, benchmarking and impact evaluation** (sessions 3 and 4 of Workshop).

## D. Substantive regional development areas and issues, roles and responsibilities

- D.1** The Project Steering Committee defined regional development broadly, while recognising the priorities and activities of universities and regions. A template with outline headings and contents set an agenda with three SER key 'content' chapters.
- D.2** Following context and background chapters, each report was to consider the Teaching and the Research missions of HEIs, expressed as human resource or labour market, and regional innovation, needs. The third section addressed a wider and 'softer' social, environmental, civic and cultural agenda. All SERs responded with something for each of these. Some were very light in the socio-cultural section, but some gave high visibility to environment, or to culture as renewal and economic development.
- D.3** The final sections of the SERs, reflected in turn by the PRRs, looked at the 'capacity' to engage and work together for development, on the part of each partner involved, suggesting what might be done to make collaboration and regional development more effective. This led to sets of

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synthesised implications and recommendations addressed to: central governments; regional authorities; the HEIs.

**D.4** Thus the Valencia monograph deriving from the 14-regions project, after generalising about drivers and barriers to engagement, considered overcoming barriers to regional business innovation, human capital formation, and social, cultural and environmental development (chapters 5-7) before concluding with chapters on capacity-building, and pointers to future development.

## **D.5 Lessons for PURE?**

- **Universities vary greatly in their histories, priorities, legal and financial status, and ways of organising and working. It is hazardous to make comparisons and define ‘best practice’ for overcoming barriers that do not take full account of these political, economic, structural and socio-cultural differences.**
- **There is however keen interest in mutual learning about how to engage and contribute, and how to overcome internal (organisational and cultural) and external (partnership and cultural) difficulties, as well as more obvious resource, difficulties. PURE should continue collecting and comparing examples of what works in what circumstances.**
- **The national (or federal) government sets a policy and resource environment, and constraints, that makes a large, even decisive, difference; changes in power and policy at national or regional level have had a decisive impact on some regions’ capacity to pursue chosen directions, and even to participate in the PURE network. PURE must acknowledge this but not expect to lobby governments; its focus is on practical learning and development at local-regional and university levels.**
- **Concentrating on the different priorities of each contracting region (see above) enhances prospects for making and learning from successful changes, because there will be more commitment to chosen priority areas.**
- **Since the 14-regions project was conceived and the earlier OECD regional development work from the mid-nineties, there have been dramatic changes in the macro geo-political environment. ‘Soft’ third sector themes, especially environment and sustainability, interwoven with regional economic development strategies and such social issues as labour market mobility and social inclusion or conflict, have gained in importance; international economic events following the USA sub-prime mortgage crisis continue to change the situation.**
- **These changes impact on regions and often on universities. Their new prominence showed in replies to the templated inquiry preceding the (May 2008) Limerick Conference. They also showed:**
  - **the increasing complexity and diversity of the regional development agenda in more disturbed times**
  - **the need both to sustain some common framework for all regions and to allow greater specialisation and concentrated effort on special priorities shared by different clusters of regions and universities, allowing each to use PURE to advance its own priorities in the way most efficient way for each (session 5 and clustering round priorities).**



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- An implication for the whole PURE project in 2008-2010 is therefore:
  - to diversify effort into 'local' projects with diverse priorities and outcomes, both findings and actions on the ground (not part of the 14-regions concept);
  - while bringing together specialised sub-groups of projects for comparison and exchange across the full network, responding to a common impact assessment agenda set by audit-conscious administrations (part of what the OECD report saw as ongoing unfinished business).

CD/PURE Sept 08