



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

PURE Regional Briefing Paper (RBP)

DARLING DOWNS, AUSTRALIA

Part 1

1. *Clarify what is meant by the region in this project e.g. historical and cultural, long-term administrative and legal, or specially created for a particular development purpose. Comment on the advantages and difficulties of the nature and understanding of the region involved. [One general benefit from the PURE project should be to gain a better understanding of what kind of region is effective for what purposes.]*

The region is the Darling Downs Region of which the city of Toowoomba is the largest city. Recently local government structures were changed in Queensland, from city/town/shire councils to Regional Councils. In many cases this involved an amalgamation of several town/shire councils. This occurred in the Darling Downs Region and was not well received by those in some of the smaller centres. They wanted to keep the old structure. Ironically the make-up of the new Regional Council has a greater representation of people from the smaller centres – many in the ‘Toowoomba city’ obviously tried to ensure that the smaller centres were well represented. The new council has been in place for approx 12 months now and there seems to be a growing resentment that the Toowoomba city is under-represented. This idea seems to be related to a belief that there is a lack of corporate experience on the new council in terms of managing an enterprise as large as the new council.

The new council embraces Toowoomba (an education centre with some agricultural manufacturing industries and a fairly strong business centre) and a number of smaller centres (Crows Nest, Cambooya, Clifton, Pittsworth, Millmerran – primarily agricultural centres although some have growing coal mining interests and an electricity power station.

It is important to understand the effect of this local government amalgamation. There is no apparent ‘glue’ which gives cohesion or purpose the region – not yet anyway.

2. *Set out briefly the key characteristics of the region in terms of geography, economy, demography, social structure, trends and changes, as these affect PURE and the development agenda.*

Geography: a fairly large inland city (whose main industry is education) surrounded by a number of small rural towns whose existence is based upon agriculture and mining.

Demography: City – large number of people who are clients or suppliers of education; large number of retired people so many retirement villages, nursing homes. Country towns - numbers decreasing in rural pursuits as farms become larger and technology takes the place of workers, young people leaving these towns except in mining areas but global downturn has dealt a blow to those wanting to pursue work in this area.

Social structure: some immigrants (Sudanese) and indigenous people – some problems with integration.

Trends and changes: increasing number of aged people, lack of access to water and over-use of water for irrigation, more multi-cultural community (refugees and international students), conservation of areas being mined.



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3. *Identify and draw together a reference list of the main data sources available on the socio-economic, environmental, etc. condition of the region, and recent trends.*

- **Water Futures Toowoomba (Google)**
- **Toowoomba Regional Council (Google)**
- **Toowoomba Chamber of Commerce Inc (Google)**
- <http://www.usq.edu.au/toowoomba/>

4. *Summarise any existing efforts to monitor and benchmark progress against purposes and targets. Please comment on any interest in and pressure for the measurement of quality and outcomes, including value for money auditing, that you are aware of in the region. [It is hoped that the project will assist an understanding of what kinds of indicators and quantitative measures of regional development and the contribution of HEIs to this work and are useful.]*

N/A

5. *List the main existing forms of collaboration between HEIs and the region. You may need to consider the region as a single administrative entity, but also note and include more localized and specialized significant HEI partnerships with other stakeholders - public, private, and NGO or third sector.*

In the Toowoomba area the main forms of collaboration seem to revolve around educational issues – many schools use the expertise of academics across most faculties in the HEI and there are a few initiatives which rate a mention – the Schools Science Challenge(a national initiative which has taken hold in this region), Flexi School (a community initiative for disadvantaged/disenfranchised youth).The HEI provides tertiary preparation programs for non-traditional students through its Open Access College. This centre is building strong links with the Sudanese community in Toowoomba. The indigenous centre at the HEI also offers tertiary preparation programs for indigenous students and provides support for these students on campus. The HEI has also established itself as a leader in open and distance learning and many people in the region have accessed studies in higher education at a distance. The work done by the HEI in online teaching and learning has led to several national/international awards and this has brought the community closer to the HEI as it has put Toowoomba on the map in an educational sense.

There have also been strong links developed between HEI and the Toowoomba community in terms of cultural pursuits. The annual Summer School (art, drama, music) attracts large numbers of locals and people from the region. The local community patronise the various recitals, plays etc that are run by the Faculty of Arts.

The Faculty of Engineering has a centre which focuses on agricultural engineering but more recently work in ‘fibre composites’ has assumed a place of importance with the backing of a local manufacturer (Wagners). This is a Toowoomba-based company.

The HEI has recently established a ‘Climate Change Centre’ and appointed one of the leading scientists in the area (Professor Roger Stone). However, this seems to have had little visible impact although there have been seminars and programs directed at rural people – how successful these have been or whether the ideas have been accepted by the regional community is difficult to discern.

The Faculty of Sciences has also established a ‘wine centre’ at Stanthorpe (100km south of Toowoomba and a significant wine-producing area in Queensland). The HEI is hoping to build a strong presence in the wine industry through this initiative through viticulture courses. This venture is facing strong competition from other regions and from other states.



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6. *If there are any examples of good practice in HEI-regional engagement that you think of special interest, perhaps for inclusion later in a PURE Good Practice Manual, please make a note of them to call to the attention of the CDG.*

Mainly Toowoomba-based at this point in time:

- **The fibre composites initiative between the Faculty of Engineering and Wagners.**
- **Flexi school initiative has resulted in an MOU being signed between the school and USQ.**
- **Schools Science Challenge – Faculty of Sciences and private/public schools.**
- **Australian Digital Futures Institute – technology enhanced learning (potential at this point in time)**
- **Artworkz – Faculty of Arts links the performing arts with events held in the community (eg Shakespeare in the Park)**
- **Open Access College/Multi-cultural centre – work with non-traditional students and particularly Sudanese community.**



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Part 2

1. What are:

1.1 The main problems and challenges

Embracing the region – still focused on Toowoomba even though the Regional Council includes other centres and rural areas.

Competing with the growth occurring in the south-east corner – Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast (have established remote campuses at Springfield in Brisbane and at Hervey Bay (Fraser Coast).

1.2 The main development aspirations that are shared by stakeholders in the region?

- **Capitalising on the potential of the educational resources in the region – Toowoomba's largest industry is education.**
- **Water – finding alternative sources for access to sufficient and continuing water supply for domestic and agricultural use.**
- **Water issue - drought-proofing measures and fast rain service from Brisbane to Toowoomba.**

Please consider the full spectrum of civil, economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors, including issues of sustainability, where these apply.

In particular, what impact is the current global financial and economic crisis – and the global environmental crisis (global warming etc) - having on your thinking and long-term planning as a region and different stakeholders? What has really altered (or is changing) in your policy planning since one year ago?

2. What are the main changes that are looked for in taking part in PURE?

2.1 For the region as a whole, and for particular communities and interests within it?

Creating a sense of community out of the restructuring that has occurred with local government reorganization.

Providing leadership in reconceptualising the concept of community, a concept that addresses the demands and challenges of the 21st century.

2.2 Within and on the part of higher education institutions i.e. sought by the HEIs themselves, and looked for by other stakeholders from HEIs?

The development of partnerships that have an impact in the community and that can influence policy at government level (regional and state levels).

2.3 In terms of how regional and local government are managed?

Making the new structure work.

2.4 In terms of the role and policies of central government?

Many see the level of state government unnecessary now. If the regional councils could be developed in a way that they could function effectively many of the state government responsibilities could be undertaken regionally – many see too much duplication between states.



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3. *What key issues do you wish to discuss with the CDG when it visits your region?*

Have mentioned some of these above but the notion of reconceptualising community, while a very difficult and obscure concept to consider, is a key issue.