

PASCAL Report to the Buskerud Region

PURE Work 2009-2010

A. Distinctive and unique features of the Buskerud Region

The County extends over a large and diverse area of Norway. The southern part is a mix of urban and rural areas and is close to Oslo. Drammen, being the main city is just 35 minutes by train from Oslo, while the northern parts are mountainous and consist of typical rural areas.

There are three cities in the region with a HiBu University College campus in each: one operating on a global scale as a high-tech industrial centre (Kongsberg), one rising as a modern (rather innovative) town after a period of industrial decline (Drammen), the third less successful and struggling with some industrial decline (Hønefoss). It is certainly a region of contrasts, needing a stronger sense of identity: there is agriculture (market gardening) in the south, a thriving industrial cluster in Kongsberg, and a rural and rather remote mountainous northern part which is important for winter (the second biggest winter tourism destination in Norway) and summer tourism, but which is suffering from a decreasing and ageing population with a greater proportion of females. Apart from the Kongsberg region the education level is below average for the country, in fact across the County participation in HE is the lowest in Norway.

The features for sustainable regional development are distinctive but in no way unique. They are shared by other PURE regions in Scandinavia characterised by commercial and industrial hubs, well served with transport links, with centres of innovation and entrepreneurial activity, but with a large hinterland of isolated small communities with far fewer options for development. Primary industries (agriculture and forestry) are challenged by limited diversification options, with low entrepreneurial skills available in an ageing population. The rural infrastructure is more difficult to maintain particularly in the current economic climate, with welfare, education and health care for example a potential burden on dwindling public funding. Innovative solutions for economic regeneration, for example in tourism and added-value specialist food production, will build a stronger sense of identity based on the natural and cultural assets of the rural areas.

In summary there are three key features:

1. Uneven development within the County. Marked contrasts between the towns with the rural areas where there are natural and cultural assets and resources not being fully utilized within the economy.
2. Low participation in higher education of parts of the population with a lack of skilled people in the health sector in particular.
3. Overall low R&D in the County.

B. Formal and informal means of engagement

The vision for Buskerud is to be *'sustainable and innovative, in order to facilitate business and demographical development'*.

At the time of the first PURE engagement the Regional Planning Strategy (just published) was seen to be a document with strong aspirations for working in partnership. However, there had been limited manifestations of such practice. Engagement with the PURE process provided a platform first to enable a dialogue to develop, and secondly to provide support and focus for ways that this vision could be realised by the County through working partnerships with research, development and innovation institutions.

Buskerud University College is the key player. The Regional Planning Strategy is therefore an important cornerstone for University College-regional engagements. The first visit of the PURE Consultative Development Group (CDG) was largely an information-gathering exercise enabling a dialogue to develop. Supported by the observations and recommendations which were made in the first Review Report, the second PURE project CDG review visit and report prompted a number of focussed conversations that were set up through the CDG.

It is always incredibly hard to change the culture of whole organizations: strategy documents lay the foundation, joint working group meetings can discuss around a table the implications of partnership working, but it is hard to embed this into tangible action and into everyday practice. This is a lengthy process of partnership building which takes time and requires the evolution of mutual trust and respect.

Through the PURE process it seems as though this is developing, although partnership working and developing trust is a slow process, and progress sometimes may seem almost imperceptible. But over the period of the PURE process there has been growing engagement through tangible joint initiatives, for example in the area of tourism. Some new insights have been introduced through the process, in particular the value of considering the development of a Human Capital Plan as so bringing a wider perspective on human capabilities through a lifelong learning strategy.

C. Benefits and prospective future gains from international networking

It is well understood in the current research and development economic climate that University-regional engagement will only yield benefits to the regional community and to the university that are sustainable if there is international connectivity. The challenge to become recognised as a university of excellence is predicated on high quality research of international status. Buskerud University College is currently negotiating to become a full University; thus the involvement with the PASCAL family can give added strength to the case.

Neither Buskerud County nor the University College have been able as yet to use the PASCAL benchmarking tool. It would seem from others' experience that there is real value in considering investing the time to bring together colleagues to work with the benchmarking tools. The region and the College would then have an internal measure to understand the 'state of the engagement', and thus monitor progress or change of organisational culture. PASCAL will be able to provide advice and support.

Involvement in the cluster discussions has not been productive for Buskerud; indeed this aspect of the Project has had only patchy success across all the PURE regions. PASCAL should review and encourage effective mechanisms for international networking, because sharing experiences across the globe on key features is very important. For Buskerud and other PURE regions, the cluster theme Sustaining Rural and Remote Communities was identified as a key issue, and one where County/University College/industry engagement should open windows to international collaborations.

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

This is a really critical area for the County and the University College to work with. It is critical in all senses, not least because of the maturity of the Buskerud University College's engagement with all the Colleges in the region, and the development of the new University of the Oslofjord Alliance. It is an exciting time, when the management of the potential disruption through State policy objectives which will favour regional and University amalgamation may confuse the discussions and provide distractions from the central purpose.

There will be merit in keeping the PURE Regional Consultative Group together, since trust has been built up together, with a growing understanding of the policy frameworks in the region and the university. Whilst this is important, it was also clear that the change in personnel at the highest management level within the region had influenced the commitment of the County to partnership. Equally, the pre-occupation of the Principal and senior managers to progress the University status had diverted their attention from regional partnerships.

The University College and the new Oslofjord Alliance will benefit from closer and more systematic consultation with the County, thus being in touch with strategic planning and execution of regional policies. This should be set within the expertise of the University College, especially in tourism, systems engineering and health care. Critical to effectiveness is the recognition given to regional engagement by departments and staff, for example through industry-led student projects, outreach activities, applied research and continuing professional development programmes.

In order to encourage consistency of engagement, recognition must extend to academic rewards, incentives and career benefits which are clearly supported by senior management.

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

The involvement of PURE in Buskerud occurred at a time when the Regional Strategic Plan and Action Plan were being published. There was an emerging recognition that a sustainable economic future needed to be designed for the whole County, and would need to embrace the multiple factors at work across the region. The recent economic crisis and its aftermath have reinforced this perspective. It is encouraging that the County will be continuing to work with PASCAL, and can benefit from the international support and networking that will accrue.