

PASCAL Report to the Jamtland Region

PURE Work 2009-2010

A. Distinctive and unique features of the Jamtland Region

Apart from the central commercial and residential centre of Ostersund, Jamtland is predominantly a sparsely populated rural region with traditional and in many ways small scale rural industry pursuits including agriculture, forestry and fishing. Ostersund has, in the last decade, been a magnet for rural – urban population drift – particularly with an ageing population seeking regular and close access to medical and other services, while the larger cities to the south in Sweden have been a magnet for ‘brain drain’, particularly among younger women attracted by professional careers and social experiences. A particular cultural feature of the rural nature of the region has been its small scale and diverse agricultural enterprise, and its traditional way of life.

These economic and demographic dynamics create an unsustainable mix in a global economy situation when conditions turn down as they have done with the recent global financial crisis (GFC). Visionary people in the region have recognised the need for a more sustainable economic and demographic dynamic for the future that makes more from local talent to enable identified opportunities to be realised and to foster social inclusion among those in remote rural areas – particularly underemployed males.

To address the growing demographic and economic imperatives and to build on the rural cultural underpinning of the region, it was decided that the future direction of the region should focus on cultural tourism as a unique and distinctive supplement to the expanding winter sports-based tourist experience centred around the ski slopes of Are in the east. This was the focus for the involvement of the region in the PURE project. Cultural tourism was seen not only from an historical narrative perspective but from a small rural enterprise perspective.

While there is much similarity with other parts of Sweden in having overlapping and duplicative regional agency responsibilities, a distinctive characteristic in Jamtland is having visionary leadership with the energy to bring about change for the betterment of the region. Increasingly, the Mid-Sweden University is seen as a key player in Jamtland, bringing expertise to enhance local human capital and innovation for established and new culturally-oriented rural enterprises and tourism destination adventures. Through PURE there is now a growing engaged relationship between the University and the region’s leadership focusing on these new strategic directions.

Impediments to achieving full success in moving the region in the desired direction include the need to up-skill many in the existing population, encouraging entrepreneurship – particularly among a generally, underemployed rural male population, fostering social inclusion among those at the margins of society, an effective and efficient transport system, achieving unified regional collaboration, supportive national higher education and regional development policies, and lack of certainty about questions of regional amalgamation. The involvement of the University in these areas will be important for the future.

B. Formal and informal means of engagement

The PURE project has had four initial and important benefits for Jamtland that provide the foundation for future work.

First it has laid the groundwork for strengthening the engaged role of the university with the region's objectives. In this there is now good dialogue and collaborative activity emerging.

Second, it has assisted in bringing together a number of regional agents and agencies in dialogue with a view to building a collaborative single regional organisation similar to the Region Varmland model. Previously there were a number of local, national and other organisations concerning themselves with Jamtland's future.

Third, PURE has stimulated the beginning of international partnership through the thematic clusters. Jamtland is already holding discussions with regions in other countries with like interests in cultural tourism.

Fourth, the PURE project has helped in crystallising the importance of building the human capital of the region across all ages in line with its strategic focus of enhancing cultural enterprise and tourism. As a result the region with participation by the university has initiated a strategic initiative with a action programme for lifelong learning.

Given where the Jamtland region was at the beginning of the PURE project in terms of regional collaboration, leadership and university engagement it is fair to conclude that significant progress in these areas has occurred with the assistance of local leadership.

C. Benefits and prospective future gains from international networking

The cultural tourism conference held in conjunction with PASCAL in July 2010 was an initial foray into exposing Jamtland to international scrutiny. The subsequent benefits from PURE, should the region decide to continue into the next phase, will be the partnership networking available through the thematic cluster arrangements. Some of this has already been occurring, but when there is partnership in real projects and good practice learning transfer from other regions, then the benefits from international networking will become more apparent. In the area of cultural tourism the region can learn much from other regions in skill requirements and training, entrepreneurship, information systems and enterprise support, destination marketing and other areas.

University/ regional engagement will only yield benefits to the regional community and to the university that are sustainable if there is international connectivity. Jamtland is one region in PURE on the cusp of entering this phase with potentially large benefits to aid in its identified future objectives.

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

An early task is for the University and the region to construct a regional human capital plan that focuses on the key regional priorities, and on the way that the whole of the education sector in the region, from youngest to oldest ages, will fit with these priorities over the long run. Once completed, issues about learning pathways, industry engagement, and curricula design will become clearer. The regional action programme on lifelong learning is a first important step in this direction.

A second task is to gain some clarity in National Government proposals for regional amalgamation in Sweden; and if it is to proceed to ensure that Jamtland regional development and university engagement initiatives are properly considered within any new arrangements.

Third, regular discussions should be held between regional and university leaders using the PURE benchmarking tools, as a framework to ascertain ways to strengthen engagement responsiveness.

Fourth, enthusiastically pursue the international partner agenda program stimulated by the PURE thematic clusters to ensure cross-fertilisation of new ideas and practices as they relate to the region's identified priority areas.

Fifth, explore the possibilities for greater inter-regional collaboration and in a Swedish context preferably with the Region Varmland.

Sixth, the University should consider management initiatives that enable greater knowledge responsiveness to regional priorities.

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

Through the leadership of the Director of the Jamtli Museum and other regional players, Jamtland has recently become a member of PASCAL International Observatory and has held a successful international conference with a focus on cultural tourism and lifelong learning. These achievements, and the progress made through PURE on regional engagement with the Mid-Sweden University, strengthened regional collaboration. Alliances built with other cluster theme regions with like concerns give the region a good basis for continuing the work of PURE in the future.

The involvement of PURE in Jamtland occurred at a time when there was an emerging recognition that a sustainable economic future needed to be designed for the region. The recent GFC and its aftermath have reinforced this perspective. The PURE benchmarking tool, while only partially advanced, is recognised in the region and the University as a means for stimulating dialogue around matters of joint interest.

Despite the promising signs that PURE initiatives will be ongoing, there are two critical factors that will play a role in the apparent sustainability becoming a reality. The first is that there must be continuation of current leadership in the region and in the University to make the engagement program work. The second is the potential for disruption through national policy requirements for either regional and/or university amalgamation. Both areas are ones for PURE to focus future efforts in, as the Project matures.