



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

PURE Regional Visit Report (RVR1)

FLANDERS, BELGIUM

25th – 27th March, 2009

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Preamble

This was one of the first CDG visits and as such was the first involvement by the four members of the team. The organisation prior to the visit was sufficient if a little last minute. All went well in terms of practical aspects, hotel, meeting up, transport, etc. The Team was made to feel very welcome by the Link Partner, Jan Geens, who worked hard to ensure that all went well.

Overall it was a busy, informative and useful exercise. In the following paragraph are some observations about how what can be learned from this visit for the future benefits of other Regional Visits.

Interestingly, awareness of PURE was much greater than that of the PASCAL Observatory. It will be interesting to debate this aspect at the Vancouver board meeting.

Team Composition

The team gelled very quickly and worked well together, in spite of this, the team felt that its composition was not wholly fit for purpose. The first observation that can be made is that all members of the team were white, male, native English-speakers from the British Isles. This was balanced to a certain extent by Barry Hake who made a conscious effort to communicate in Dutch where appropriate and emphasise his long career in the Netherlands. This was certainly beneficial.

Secondly, it was felt that Barry and John Field overlapped in their areas of expertise and interest, which, while not ideal for the purpose, is understandable given the very strong representation of educationalists in the pool of PASCAL Observatory associates.

Regional Participants

Given the 3 day visit period there was an over-representation from HEI personnel in the visits this resulted in a generally one-dimensional picture of the Region. A broader representation of views and information from different levels of government (the policy dimension) and the private sector (the demand-side of the question) would have been especially beneficial to the Review Team.

The quality of the intervention was variable, and some of the information provided to the Team in, for example overly-lengthy formal presentations had already been provided, or could have been summarised to enable more time for questions and debate. This was especially the case during the visit to the University of Hasselt.

Conclusions

The organisation of study visits is always difficult and there are inevitable gaps in participants for a wide variety of reasons.

The visit was the beginning of the process and as a result it is hoped that it served a secondary purpose as a marketing tool for the PURE study. On a positive note there were examples of the visit stimulating interest in previously reluctant partners – one example of this was the eleventh hour participation of senior representatives from the region's most prestigious university – KU Leuven.

Essential regional characteristics

The Belgian constitution defines the nation state of Belgium in terms of a federal system of government based upon recognition of the three languages, Dutch, French and German, which are used by the respective populations in three distinct geographical areas. Historical and current political debates are dominated by the ongoing process of (re-) determining the respective constitutional responsibilities of the national, regional and local governments.

For policy purposes, Flanders must be understood as comprising the Dutch-speaking Flemish Region, the northern part of Belgium, and as the Flemish Community including the Dutch-speaking inhabitants of Brussels, the Belgian capital. Flanders is governed from Brussels, also the national capital city, by its own parliament and government with specific competences. At the moment these responsibilities include town and country planning, roads, housing, culture, and tourism, but more specifically education including higher education. The current constitutional crisis in Belgium relates to the further decentralization of policy responsibilities, for example social security, to the regional level. As a result of linguistic differences, Belgium is a nation with numerous parliaments, each with its distinctive jurisdiction, including higher education!

Flanders is the most densely populated geographical region in the EU with 452 inhabitants per square kilometre. Population is concentrated in the area circumscribed by the Brussels-Antwerp-Ghent-Leuven agglomerations known as the Flemish Diamond. Other important urban centres are Bruges and Kortrijk to the west, and Turnhout and Hasselt to the east. As of April 2005, the Flemish Region has a population of 6,058,368 with a further 1,018,029 people in the Brussels Region considering themselves Flemish. Of the Flemish region population, 5,75% are immigrant or non-Belgian citizens. As is the case of other EU member states, Belgium is characterized by a significantly ageing population.

The Flemish economy is characterized by the long-term transition from traditional manufacturing industries, such as coal-mining, textiles and textile machinery, together with agriculture, towards a post-industrial economy. Processing industries, with an emphasis upon chemicals, metal, car manufacturing, and food and drink now dominate the Flemish economy, together with service sectors such as banking, ICT and tourism. Given the importance of the North Sea ports, logistics comprise a significant economic sector in Flanders. In this regard, the Flemish economy is highly sensitive to the current economic crisis with particular reference to the large number of SME's. Unemployment is increasing especially among the younger generation.

The Belgian constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the various governments generally respect this right to practice. Since independence in 1839 (treaty of London), Catholicism, counterbalanced by strong free thought movements, has had an important role in Belgium's politics, this has been further underlined by the strong Catholic influence on universities and university colleges, notably Leuven.



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

According to the 2001 Survey and Study of Religion, about 47 percent of the Belgian population identify themselves as belonging to the Catholic Church while Islam is the second largest religion at 3.5 percent. A 2006 inquiry in Flanders, found 55% described themselves as religious (VEPEC, 2006).

Education is compulsory from the ages of 6 to 18, but most Flemings continue to study until around 23. Among the OECD countries in 1999, Flanders had the third-highest proportion of 18–21-year-olds enrolled in postsecondary education. Flanders also scores very highly in international comparative studies on education. Its secondary school students consistently rank among the top three countries for mathematics and science.

However, the success is not evenly spread: the ethnic minority youth score is consistently lower, and the difference is larger than in most comparable countries. There is some evidence that gender plays an important role in ethnic minority post-secondary education, for example young women from BME backgrounds demonstrate significantly higher participation rates than their male equivalents. Further, young BME women are more likely to continue their studies longer than non-BME Flemings from the same or similar social backgrounds.

In common with many developed regions, Flanders is facing the challenge of a rapidly ageing population, referred to in Flanders Today as the 'Age Crunch' (10th March 2009). The dual pressure of workers retiring earlier and young families choosing to have fewer children later, is seen as a major concern for the Flemish regional government.

The higher education sector in Flanders consists of 5 universities with a total of 60,866 students and 22 university colleges with 105,825 students. So it is clear that the sector is unusual in structure compared with other countries where universities dominate in student numbers. The institutions are also very uneven in size with over half of the students in the university sector being registered with Leuven University, whilst other universities are very small by international standards such as Hasselt with only 2500 students. Universities are funded by the Flemish regional government and remain quite heavily dependent on state funding, and so are strongly oriented to a Flemish identity, but with varying degrees of engagement with then local sub-region within Flanders.

Key policy developments

The Regional Government of Flanders has ambitious plans for its future position among European Regions. Flanders has a strong economic tradition and considers itself to be well-placed as a future economic driver for the European Union. Equally, the clear commitment to economic growth is set in the context of a sustainable future both in terms of Flanders' society and environment.

The cultural and linguistic identity of the Flanders, combined with the pressures of being one of Europe's most densely populated regions pose particular challenges to any government strategy for growth.

In order to realise this vision the Regional Government of Flanders has produced two key documents Vlaanderen in Actie ('Flanders in Action' December 2008) and Pact 2020 (January 2009). Both of these put forward clear support for the role of higher education within current and future regional development.

Flanders in Action - Flanders Outlook

"The ambition of Flanders is to be one of the top regions in terms of economic prosperity, innovation and technology by 2020, without increasing social inequality or placing an unnecessary burden on the environment to achieve this." (Vlaanderen in Actie, 2008: 2).

Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

This ambitious statement sets the scene for Flanders in Action. The document is predominantly an attempt to establish the baseline quantitative indicators against which progress in achieving its ambition will be measured. This covers a standard range of regional indicators, many from Eurostat, that allow regional comparison to be made. For the purposes of the present study it is important to note the emphasis on five proxy indicators of 'innovation' which make up the large part of the document. The indicators focus on:

- **Conditions for Innovation:** the share of workers with higher level education against participation rates in lifelong learning.
- **Knowledge Creation:** Research and Development spending as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product.
- **Innovation and Entrepreneurship:** Total entrepreneurial activity sourced from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor.
- **Application of Innovation:** combining share of workers in knowledge-intensive sectors with labour force in creative industries.
- **Intellectual Property:** number of patents.

The report concludes that Flanders was ranked bottom of the regions against which it chose to benchmark itself and this was especially the case with unemployment.

Further, it highlights the Flemish paradox of a highly educated working-age population (in terms of higher education diplomas and degrees) that has limited engagement in lifelong learning. This latter point was clear in the findings of the Regional Visit and provides one of the major challenges facing the Region's ambition.

Pact 2020

Whereas Flanders in Action sought to establish the current position of the Flanders in relation to self-selected benchmark regions, Pact 2020 sets the vision of how to achieve its ambition.

The signatories of the pact identified five principal domains for intervention:

- Greater prosperity and welfare.
- A competitive and sustainable economy.
- More workers gainfully employed, in more suitable jobs, and for longer average career terms.
- A high quality standard of living.
- An efficient and effective administration. (Pact 2020).

To achieve these, Pact 2020 sets out twenty objectives to help Flanders become one of the top regions in Europe. The focus below is on those key objectives that have direct relevance to the purposes of the present study.

- Flanders will progress towards a competitive and multi-faceted knowledge economy distinguished by the generation of sustainable prosperity and welfare.
- In 2013, Flanders will allocate three percent of its gross domestic product to research and development.
- In terms of its entrepreneurial culture, Flanders will rank among the top five European regions. More enterprises are being formed, and they receive greater appreciation for their work. Young starters are encouraged and already existing enterprises are receiving more growth opportunities.
- By 2020, Flanders will have grown into a learning society. The number of poorly educated citizens will be cut in half. Within higher education, the participation rate will increase,

Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

irrespective of the student's origin, the employment situation or the education level of the parents.

Further Pact 2020 sets out its vision of the 'Learning Fleming' a policy to address the aforementioned paradox of high educational achievement but low participation in lifelong learning. The 'Learning Fleming' focuses on personal development plans supported by:

- Investment in education.
- Choice of a dynamic network education.
- Learning opportunities in the workplace.
- Opportunities to pursue one's special interests.
- Due attention to Work and Family.
- A learning civil society.
- An open and international image.

Higher Education Reform – The Decree of 1995 and Bologna

Given the centrality of higher education, research and business innovation to the vision of the regional government of Flanders, it is important to understand the context in which HEI's operate.

Prior to 1995 HE in Flanders was delivered by 2 distinct types of institution, the five Universities and around 250 small, often single domain (for example nursing), university colleges or Hogescholen. These two types of institution were broadly distinguished by their teaching and research activities. On the one hand Universities would offer traditional academic subjects and focus on pure research, whereas Hogescholen pursued a mission of professional education and applied research.

By the early 1990s, however the Hogescholen were becoming increasingly distant from their strong links with employers and reform was needed. Reform came in the shape of the Decree of 1995 which saw Hogescholen institutions merge reducing the total to 22. The purpose of this merger was to sharpen up the Hogescholen in relation to teaching, arts, research and development, services to society and internationalisation.

Shortly after, the Bologna Declaration of 1999 set the parameters for a European Higher Education Area by 2010 based upon a three cycle approach (bachelors, masters and doctorate). In order to prepare HEI's in Flanders for this process a co-operation model between Hogescholen and universities was designed with an emphasis on educational quality and research excellence. As a result new associations of universities and Hogescholen were established based upon the principle of free choice thus changing the education geography of Flanders.

A number of challenges face HEI's in Flanders as a result of these two processes which are clearly of central importance to the present study. These include:

- Dealing with duplication of activity in newly associated HEI's.
- Management and funding.
- Movement of staff and students within or across associated HEI's.
- Premises consolidation.
- Fluidity of educational routes within associated HEI's (e.g. professional bachelors to 'classical' masters).
- Research focus, applied vs pure and regional engagement.
- Entrepreneurial activity of HEI's.

Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

Barriers and challenges to engagement

There were a number of issues emerged during the meeting which influence the potential for engagement and which will be important to be addressed during the main phase of work in the region.

Consequences of restructuring between universities and university colleges

It was explained to the panel that there is the prospect over the next 2-3 years of significant restructuring of the roles of the universities and university colleges. Broadly speaking the university colleges have focused on vocational education (with the exception of law and medicine), but have developed some more academic programmes and have expanded into higher degrees. As a result of mergers these are becoming more significant institutions. On the other hand the universities are supposed to be focused on more academic subjects, and offer higher degrees. What is proposed is that those academic programmes being delivered in the university colleges should be transferred to the universities, and equally any vocational programmes in universities should go to the university colleges. Additionally there may be some mergers between universities and colleges to give dual sector institutions. We were told that the basic legislation for these developments had been agreed, but that the local implementation was still subject to negotiation.

This is an interesting development which raises a number of questions for engagement. We were curious as to the rationale for the preservation of an artificial distinction between vocational and academic education and wondered at the possible implications of this for engagement. Elsewhere it is often the vocational departments of a university that engage most actively with their local region, especially through student placements as an essential element of training and the linkages that therefore develop with employers and partner organisations. If these activities are to be concentrated purely in the university colleges then does this risk the universities becoming more academic and less engaged, or at least engaged around a more limited agenda? The region needs to review whether such structural changes will have an influence on the nature of engagement more widely, and whether the period of time negotiating between institutions over transfers will divert attention from the needs of the region, especially given the current economic climate. The consequences of all of this were not clear to us and we anticipate this will be a key factor in policy over the next few years.

Funding issues for engagement

Engagement at present is determined by the needs of specific teaching and research programmes, by the need to deliver appropriate services to students and by some specific funding opportunities such as under the Structural Funds. There seems to be no specific policy from the Flemish Government to influence the nature of engagement, and no funding for engagement as such. We were told by representatives of government that under the principle of autonomy this was purely a matter for the universities and that government did not have information on what was happening. Funding was allocated to universities according to their teaching programmes, but universities were free to use it as they saw fit. Inevitably though the culture was to ensure that government funding was spent on the programmes for which it was intended. Government wanted universities to increase funding from other sources but felt it would need a generation to acquire the skills at a senior management level to be a responsive entrepreneurial university, although some were better at this than others. Government wanted universities to be engaged and to expand their activities in the social field, but seemed to lack a mechanism to encourage this or indeed any real understanding of how to do this.

Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

The universities on the other hand felt the consequences of funding being focused on the outputs of their programmes, and the proposals that funding would be tied to graduating students will probably have significant impacts – elsewhere this has disadvantaged universities that take on more marginal students with a higher risk of drop-out. As there was no funding for engagement then this made it difficult to work outside of project mode as any institutional capacity had to be funded by the universities themselves. Additionally an effect of Bologna has been to give greater emphasis to research as a fundamental characteristic of a university, and this also reduces the emphasis on engagement.

Staff incentives

A particular issue which follows from the funding is the absence of incentives for individual staff to engage with the local region. The emphasis on research has its effect on young academic staff in steering them to a focus on research, even at the expense of teaching. One area we probed was teaching programmes tied to local interests and we were told that any such activities run in the evening or at weekends would have to be delivered within existing contracts on top of existing teaching loads and with no possibility of financial incentivisation. As a result this rarely happened. No consideration of successful engagement was taken into consideration in promotion and workload models that could encompass engagement as a legitimate activity did not exist. It was therefore difficult to see why staff would engage regionally unless it contributed to research outputs, or was directly funded, or the staff member concerned had a particular interest which was stronger than the desire for promotion.

The complexity of the governance system

The overall governance system of the region seemed very complex, and the multiple layers of government confusing. There was no evidence that the institutions in the region found this to be problematic, although there was some confusion over whether the institutions in Brussels were part of the project despite not being in the region of Flanders but being part of the Flemish community.

The proliferation of networks

The associations of universities and university colleges seemed to us to be of great importance in the relationships with the region, especially as some were sub-regionally focused. We did not have a clear picture of the geography and membership of these networks however and it seemed that some overlapped with some institutions being in more than one network. This again could be a source of confusion to external partners and we would like to have more clarification of the form and role of these networks.

Economic development challenges

The universities and university colleges that we saw seemed to be taking engagement with SMEs and the economy seriously and this was central to their regional activities. Whilst Leuven University has an international reputation for technology transfer and spin off firms, it was clear that other universities are also seeking to develop high quality research that can have impacts on the regional economy. The University of Hasselt has recently developed a technology transfer office and is focusing its research activities in a limited range of areas where it can have an impact on the local economy through spin offs. The university specifically sets out to serve the region. Although the



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

research-led strategy means that the focus is on the development of new industries perhaps rather than support for the existing traditional industries in the area.

The university colleges tend to have a different approach to local industry as they have closer relations with employers through the placement of their students and hence were more focused on support for existing SMEs through the application of technology to traditional industries. We saw excellent examples of projects to support industry at KHLIM.

Despite this there were concerns expressed by representatives of industry, about the lack of openness to universities within SMEs and a mutual lack of understanding. The employers' federation expressed a view that universities need to be producing graduates that were well-trained and ready to contribute, but also had an entrepreneurial attitude and an international perspective. There was also the common problem of difficulty in persuading young people to study engineering.

The role of students

The role of students as forces in regional engagement emerged at several points during the visit, with some contradictory views being expressed at times. Organised student voluntary activity does not seem to take place in the same form as some other countries, and we were told that students did their volunteering outside of the university context. However there were some examples of engagement by the student organisations that provided services to students. A number of issues and conflicts seem to emerge in fields such as student housing, social facilities, sport etc, and the student associations needed to develop relations with local bodies to resolve these. In Leuven in particular the high concentration of students has a significant impact on the city, exacerbated by students who study in Brussels choosing to live there. It was felt that the students had a positive impact on the locality though from a social control perspective. In Brussels the problems were more difficult to deal with due to a shortage of housing and an absence of dedicated student infrastructure. Leisure activities particularly seemed to have a dual edge as the presence of students helped to maintain a higher level of cultural and sporting activity, but some university societies restricted access to students or negotiated lower prices for students among other providers thereby creating tension with local non-students. Despite this though the students societies sought to get involved in local debate on planning issues, often perhaps in a more proactive way than the university management.

Conclusions of the panel

The region is highly complex with a highly complex governance structure and universities are expected to negotiate a plethora of partners, operating at the level of Flanders, the Flemish community and at regional and municipality level within these. In addition there are important cross border links within the Euregio with the Netherlands, Germany and Wallonie.

There is considerable uncertainty about the future division between universities and university colleges with varied messages about institutional merger, regional associations and the transfer of programmes between institutions. A top down approach to this may not be appropriate in determining the best combinations to meet local needs and regionally differentiated models may be preferable. At the moment for example it was not clear to us whether full merger between universities and university colleges is possible giving dual sector institutions as exist in other countries, although this may be a suitable option given the large number of institutions in Flanders.

The large number of institutions in the Flanders region, 6 universities and 22 university colleges (does that include Flemish institutions in Brussels?) is high for a region of 6 million and high for a

PURE region. It was not clear to us that all the institutions were willing to participate and certainly there was no sense that all would undertake the university benchmarking activity, or whether they would be willing to pool raw data into a regional report. Assurances should be sought before Vancouver that all institutions are willing participants or else a strategy developed to ensure representativeness of the main analysis phase.

There has been a move in recent years towards autonomy although most institutions are still dependent on core funding from the Flemish government. It was not clear what powers the government had to steer the direction of institutions other than funding students, and whether this could be used in a proactive way to achieve regional development objectives. Equally, we felt that some of the institutions were still learning how to make best use of their autonomy. Universities needed to acquire the culture and skills at all levels in order to be responsive autonomous institutions and this is an ongoing challenge.

Regional engagement seemed to be strongest in the economic and employment area and still developing in some of the other main strands of engagement. There seems to be a shortage of policy research in the universities feeding through to region's needs and contributing to regional debates.

Lifelong learning is under-developed as the main focus of the universities is with young students. There particularly seems to be problems for second chance education.

Problem of lack of incentive for individual academics to engage with region.

Some Observations about the Review Visit

Representatives of region in meetings with the review team.

Wednesday 25.03.09

General meeting involving HEI's and stakeholders.

Representatives of the Ministry of Education and research:

- Tony Keuleers, administration H.E.
- Liesbeth Hens, administration H.E. (asked).
- Stijn Eeckhaut, EWI.
- Anton Derks, Onderwijs en Vorming, Strategisch Onderwijsbeleid.
- Ann Van den Cruyce, WSE.
- Tom Dekeyzer, Flemish Ministry of Education.

Representatives of the HEI's:

- Annemie Van den dries (international expert).
- Frederik Van Assche (Lessiushogeschool).
- Wendy Danko (PHL).
- Chris Gillijns (PHL).
- Marc Lambrechts (KUB).
- Thierry Taverna (KHK).
- Piet Van Hove (UA).
- Marleen Verbeke (Arteveldehogeschool).
- Guiseppe Pace, UGent.



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

Dinner with key persons of universities, university colleges and cities.

- Jan Geens (LP).
- Annegreet Olijve (LP).
- Luc François (UGent).
- Johan Veeckman (Arteveldehogeschool).
- Flora Carryn (Lessius hogeschool).
- Yamilla Idrissi (Brussels Gewest).
- Martinus Buekers (KUL, verontschuldigd).

Thursday 26.03.09

Site visits to University of Hasselt and University Colleges PHL, KHLIM and XIOS

Third meeting with the representatives of the Universiteit Hasselt and site-visit:

- Ann-Pascale Bijmens, Director TTO UHasselt;
- Debora Dumont, Life Sciences Manager
- Peter Vandoren, Director EDM
- Steven Van Passel, Cleantech manager.

Lunch with key persons of the HEI's and the province:

- Gedeputeerde van de provincie (verontschuldigd).
- Luc De Schepper, Rector van de UHasselt.
- Ben Lambrechts, algemeen directeur PHL.
- Dirk Franco, algemeen directeur XIOS.
- Willy Indeherberghe, algemeen directeur KHLIM.
- KHLIM, Katholieke Hogeschool van Limburg.
- Wendy Danko, PHL.
- Wim Jackmaer, PHL.
- Michaël Joris, KHLIM.
- Ine Geerts, KHLIM.
- Kristien Bauwens, XIOS.
- Linda Amel, XIOS.
- Luc Indestege, Quadri KHLIM en XIOS.
- VKW en UNIZO.

Site-visit to KHLIM and the Technological Center of KHLIM en XIOS, poster presentations of projects worked out by PHL, KHLIM and XIOS.

Friday 27.03.09

Representatives of the student organization VVS and of the STUVO organisations:

- Student Jonas Vincken
- Student Thijs Verburght
- Jan De Vriendt, STUVO-KUL
- Els Huylebroeck, STUVO-hogeschool
- Ben Van Beeck, STUVO-hogeschool



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

Representative of the universities in a VLIR meeting of working group equal opportunities presided by Machteld De Metsenaere and Truiken Ossenblok.

Representatives of umbrella-organisations in business matters:

- Joseph Neyens, president of VIK, Flemish Chamber for Industrial engineers.
- Noël Lagast, responsible VIK communication.
- Nele Muys, advisor UNIZO-Studiedienst.
- Peter Verboven, VOKA Flemish Network for Enterprises.
- Marion Vrijens of afgevaardigde, VIA, Flanders in Action.
- Peter-Paul Knops-Gerits, VLEVA, Flemish agency connecting Flanders to the EU.
- Magda Kirsch & Yves Beernaert, Educonsult.