



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

PURE Regional Visit Report (RVR1)

NTH ILLINOIS, USA

March 30th – April 1st 2009

Consultative Development Group (CDG):

Jose-Gines Mora, Professor, University of London

Hans G. Schuetze, Professor, University of British Columbia

Larry Swanson, Professor, University of Montana

John Tibbitt, PASCAL CEO, Senior Research Fellow, University of Glasgow

Introduction

The CDG visit took place between 29th March and 1st April 2009, and was hosted by Northern Illinois University Outreach and its Center for Governmental Studies and Office of Community College Relations. The NIU staff provided comprehensive and well developed briefing papers for the CDG.

The focus of the visit was a general concern with the engagement of higher education institutions in the region with workforce and economic development, and more specifically with efforts to establish a collaborative approach between NIU and community colleges in the region to address issues around the skills needs of employers in the region and poverty reduction in the area by raising the skills of the lower earning members of the population.

In general terms, the purposes of the initial visit were to:

- Familiarise key stakeholders in the regions about the PURE project and process.
- Enable the CDG to properly understand the nature of the Northern Illinois region, the main developmental priorities and aspirations in the region, and the context in which these developments were being pursued.
- Form preliminary views on issues relating to the engagement of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the regions on priority developmental themes.
- Discuss the process of dialogue, already initiated by NIU, with the community colleges and various stakeholder groups in the region.
- Discuss possible courses of action, including benchmarking, to be taken forward following the Vancouver PURE workshop (May 09) and for the second CDG visit in early 2010.

To these ends, the visit proceeded through a series of wide ranging discussions with several key stakeholder groups with an interest in the objectives of the engagement process in the region. The CDG met with:

- Staff from the Center for Government Studies (CGS), Community College Relations (CCD), and other NIU staff involved in external affairs.
- The VP for University Administration and Outreach, and the Deans of several faculties of NIU.
- Representatives of 12 Community Colleges from the region as well as the VP for Adult Education and Institutional Support of the Illinois Community College Board.
- Area economic development directors and others agents involved in economic and community development.



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

- Regional representatives of workforce development organisations, mostly not-for-profit, many of them working with people needing support for participating in the labour market.

This report briefly summarises the characteristics of the region (most of them from the CGS briefing papers prepared for the visit) and the higher education system, and main points of discussions among themselves and with those they met, and reflections by the members of the visiting team. It also offers a few observations, comments and suggestions for further action.

It should be noted at the outset that, as is normal for PURE reviews, three of the four members of the visiting team were from outside the country, and their perspective and background are international rather than US specific. This is not meant as an excuse in case our report contains errors of facts, but rather an explanation for possible misunderstandings or misconceptions about the specific US context in which the present NIU initiative takes place. It is the very purpose of the PURE project and the visits by international teams of experts to provide regions with a critical reflection and response as seen by outside observers which will form the basis for further discussions, both within the region and with the CDG as well as with other regions participating in the PURE exercise.

Northern Illinois University (NIU) and the Region

The Region

The region of Northern Illinois is geographically defined as the area of the State which lies north of the main Interstate Highway 80. The region thus stretches from Lake Michigan on the east to the Mississippi river on the west, and north to the border with the State of Wisconsin. The eastern side of the region is dominated by the metropolitan area of Chicago and its suburbs. Although Chicago is the great economic and political hub and has therefore great importance for the region, for the purposes of the PURE study the Northern Illinois region is defined as being outside of, even if adjacent to, this metropolitan area. This means that this report will focus on the North West and North Central region.

The Chicago area has seen constant growth stemming from its strategic position as the hub of extensive east-west and north-south railways, reinforced by the more recent development of the St Lawrence Seaway, the interstate highway network and large international airports. Development has continued to push population further out from Chicago through the so-called 'collar counties' to the 'ring around the collar counties' around the city some 40 - 60 miles from the city centre. Further west, the country is predominantly agricultural with smaller scattered communities.

The total population of the region, including Chicago, is some 9.6m, of whom approximately two thirds were born in the State of Illinois, a further 20 percent were born elsewhere in the US and around 17 percent were born outside the US. The region still experiences continued population growth, largely as a result of migration to the area, often of African Americans from the south and Hispanics. Newcomers tend to settle in outlying areas where they are working in low-paid service and retail occupations, and may lack access to public transportation and support services found in larger established communities. The PURE region, excluding Chicago, has a population of 4.6m.

The region has experienced profound economic and social transformation over the last 25 years. Large numbers of manufacturing jobs have been lost and replaced by administrative and service sector jobs. While the growing influence of global business patterns has largely favoured the Chicago metropolitan area with substantial growth in business and corporate services, other parts of the region have been affected in different ways. Smaller industrial towns have experienced declines in branch-plant industrial production, and new agricultural technologies have favoured the growth of corporately owned cash-crop cultivation, and a move away from family-owned farms.



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

The combined effect of these changes is showing in a number of trends. Illinois is losing high paying manufacturing jobs while gaining new, mostly low paying service jobs, leading to growing inequality in income. There remains a very uneven distribution of jobs and income by gender and ethnic background across different sectors in the labour market. For example, unemployment rates in 2007 for African Americans were over twice that of whites and almost double that of Hispanics. While the new jobs are mostly low-skilled, the labour force has become more diverse and better educated in recent years, with only 10.3% lacking a high school diploma. This points to a growing gap between job skill requirements and potential skill levels.

The region has a hugely decentralised government system. Within the state there are large numbers of separate governmental units responsible for counties, municipalities, school districts, community college districts and a host of other specific services. Boundaries between authorities are often not co-terminus, overlapping, creating complexity in service planning and delivery, and difficulties in forming a concept of the region. In addition to the state offices and agencies, there is a host of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the field of economic development and labour market services and social assistance.

The Higher Education system

The State system consists of 9 public universities on 12 campuses, 48 community colleges, 97 independent not-for-profit colleges and universities, 35 independent for-profit institutions and 22 out-of-state institutions. Although the State does not have, unlike California (an internationally well known model of a three tier HE system), an agreed upon and legislated 'master plan' for Higher Education (HE) which clearly spells out and articulates the differences between the three tiers with consequences for institutional mission, access, governance and funding, there is actually a de facto three tier system in place in Illinois as well. Like the University of California, the top tier is formed by the University of Illinois, with its three main campuses in Chicago, Urbana-Champaign and Springfield, while the six regional universities, of which NIU is one, are comparable to the California layer of state universities offering 4 year degree (bachelor) as well as master and doctoral programs. The third layer is the Community Colleges which offer a wide range of provision from adult basic and remedial education, non-credit continuing education, vocational training programs as well as the two first years of academic programs.

Whereas the city of Chicago has several major private universities, four state-funded universities, and seven community colleges, the HE sector in the northern region outside Chicago has only one state university, NIU, as well as 19 community colleges. There are also some private universities in the region, some of them institutions that offer programs at a distance.

According to its mandate, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) co-ordinates the entire post-secondary system, including recommending budgets to the state governor. It consists of sixteen members - ten appointed by the Governor, one representative each of public universities, and private colleges and universities, also appointed by the Governor; the chairs of the Illinois Student Assistance Commission and the Illinois Community College Board; and two student members chosen by the Student Advisory Committee, one of whom must be a non-traditional student. While the Board has thus a membership representative of the Illinois HE system, several remarks with regard to the IBHE gave the CDG the impression that it is quite politicised and therefore not very efficient with regard to its intended role of an impartial coordinating body. However, this lack of efficiency might also be the result of the insistence by universities on their autonomy and, in the case of the Community Colleges, on their mandate to serve the population of their district.

Illinois HEIs engage in a range of forms of collaborative activity, but the nature and scope of these activities relates to the type and size of the institutions. Community colleges tend to have a clear focus on their particular geographical area, reflecting not only their mandate but also the fact that



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

they are funded partly from property taxes from their district, while universities' engagement is wider than the region in which they are located. Collaboration between the different HE institutions could address a range of issues relating to labour force, community and individual development, promoting social cohesion and inclusion and increasing global connectedness of the region.

Public funding for Higher Education in the state has remained level or decreased for the past decade. No funds for capital improvement have been allocated to replace or upgrade inadequate or unsafe infrastructure. In contrast, costs have increased and there is a growing gap between revenues and expenditures. As a consequence, tuition has been raised to unprecedented levels. While this does not seem a major problem for the University of Illinois institutions who can and do charge tuition and fees significantly higher than the other public institutions, the possibilities of regional universities to do so are much more limited (current tuition and fees for students from the state is approx. \$9,000 and \$16,000 for out-of-state students).

In comparison, some community colleges, especially the 'collar' and the 'ring-around-the-collar' counties, are doing better than NIU and the other state universities as they receive additional funding from local taxes, which permits some of them to construct major new buildings and other infrastructure projects.

Northern Illinois University (NIU)

NIU goes back to 1899, when it was established as the Northern Illinois State Normal School solely to prepare college-educated teachers. Today, NIU is a comprehensive teaching and research institution and ranges, according to the NIU web site, among the nation's premier regional public universities. NIU has currently some 25,000 students (of whom 19,000 undergraduates and 750 international students). More than 90 percent are from the state. No data were available as to how many students come from the region itself.

Its mission statement reads like that of any other national research university and nothing points to its special role as a "regional" university:

- The central mission of the university is the transmission, expansion, and application of knowledge through teaching, research and artistry, and public service. In fulfilling that mission, Northern Illinois University meets the needs of students for liberal, professional, technical, and lifelong education. ...
- The university recognizes that it has a basic obligation to contribute to the betterment of the society of which it is a part. It believes that a democratic society requires an articulate citizenry, aware of the diverse multicultural nature of its national heritage, willing and able to participate in its governance, and capable of evaluating its goods and services. It believes that an ethical society requires of its members an informed sense of personal and collective values. It believes that a progressive society must keep pace with the need for new knowledge, including technological advances, and that its members must be able to continue to learn and be capable of self-renewal. It believes that a productive society requires a current and continually replenished workforce. The university believes that the quality of individual and social life depends on the quality of mind; and it commits itself to preparing students for effective, responsible, and articulate membership in the complex society in which they live as well as in their chosen professions or occupations.
- Recognizing that students will need to learn throughout their lives, the university provides them with the opportunity to become more competent in analytical thought, informed judgment, and effective communication and to develop an appreciation for the life of the mind. ... It aims to develop a respect for rationality, a tolerance for ambiguity, and an appreciation of diversity. It fosters the capacity to explore the unfamiliar, to use the intellect in the process of discovery and the synthesis of knowledge, and to become familiar with new technology and its implications. It strives to enhance the imagination, sensibility, and creative talents of each student. It believes



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

that all students should attain a level of academic and professional competence sufficient for productive employment and citizenship and that many students should be able to undertake the advanced study required for leadership in their chosen professional fields and academic.

Although there is nothing in this mission statement that refers explicitly to local or regional missions and links, NIU has a number of policies and mechanisms in place that emphasise regional responsibilities, outreach and cooperation. To emphasise this mandate and make cooperative initiatives more efficient and sustainable, NIU has brought together into one division several units and activities that were serving the region. The outreach division, created in 2000, unites twelve separate units including continuing education, under the direction of the VP for administration and university outreach. With the central planning and marketing, all the regional outreach activities can be done more efficiently and individual outreach and service activities are strengthened.

Examples for regionally-focussed policies and programs are the transfer policy for accepting students who have started their education at any one of the state's community colleges and wish to complete a baccalaureate degree. Also, NIU has an important internship program (according to a NIU brochure 'one of the nation's largest') with employers, most of them are presumably located in the region.

More recently, NIU has defined 'Strategic Planning Imperatives' which are supposed to guide internal decision making and planning. This comprehensive document spells out NIU's commitment to 'Strengthen and Extend NIU's Regional and Global Impact', however in a fairly broad way and with no specific mention of collaboration with the community colleges:

As its name implies, Northern Illinois University is intimately connected to the region it serves and the communities from which it draws most of its students. But just as NIU has grown and changed through the decades, so has its region evolved into one that is both multi-cultural and multi-national. As a consequence NIU has simultaneously become a global, national, and regional university with a reputation for excellence in strategic centers of research, artistry, and scholarship. It offers high-quality, experience-based education at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. NIU thrives in relation to the vitality of its extraordinarily complex region. The university is committed to direct, two way interactions with area communities and other external constituencies – regional, national and global – through the creation, exchange, and application of knowledge, information, and expertise for mutual benefit. NIU maintains a continuous presence throughout the region, connecting stakeholders with NIU resources in research, artistry, and scholarship, and adding value to the region's growth and development.

Defining regional impact with national and global consequences:

NIU's regional impact is most clearly reflected in the identity and aspirations of its students, most of whom come from the region and return to it after graduation (or remain employed there while seeking additional educational credentials). This concentrated impact on the workforce of a global region is further enhanced by NIU's commitment to providing experiential learning opportunities in the "living laboratory" of the greater Chicago area.

NIU vigorously pursues strategic partnerships, alliances, and collaborative initiatives that enhance student learning, inform scholarly pursuits, provide venues for artistic expression, and leverage university resources for the good of the region. University engagement in a global region connects NIU to national and international audiences, initiatives, and agendas. Those connections put university programs and experts on a global stage, strengthening NIU's reputation and influence on public policy and professional practice. ...

The CDG noted that there is no clear indication in either document that NIU sees it as a priority to work with the community sector towards a more coordinated 'regional education model' to address



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

gaps and mismatches in the regional labour market. While this might not be of practical importance internally – although the CDG thinks that it would help senior management to accept outreach and regional engagement as a core activity – a clear and visible statement in one of the central policy documents would make the case more forcefully and dissipate doubts that the community colleges and other partners might have about NIU’s commitment to the new collaborative process.

Developments and Key Issues

Regional Priorities, Ambitions and Aspirations

In spite of several externally focused programs and the new emphasis on outreach activities, formal collaboration between NIU and the wider community college sector has been limited to a small number of locally delivered courses and degrees at three University Outreach Centers and five community college campuses. This is changing however. Upon the initiative of NIU, recently (in early 2009) the presidents of NIU and of community colleges met to discuss collaboration on regional workforce and economic development issues. The initial meeting affirmed institutional commitments to addressing at least one priority that would be valuable to all of the participating institutions. At this event, the main issue identified was in relation to workforce development, and would address a series of related questions about the availability of existing and projected jobs and career paths, the ways in which the post-secondary educational system might be contributing to skills shortages, and gaps and the strategies which might be adopted to address such gaps. A second objective was identified in relation to the alleviation of poverty, although the first is the main priority.

The ambition is to create structures through which the Northern Illinois HEIs may engage in meaningful collaboration, which will bring measurable improvements to the ability of the partners’ capability to connect residents with careers and wider opportunities, and allow the participants to benefit from comparative international research and innovation in designing and implementing regional engagement initiatives.

Not surprisingly, the objectives and exact terms of the collaboration were still a bit elusive at the time of the CDG visit (two months after the presidents’ meeting), but once better articulated, they will provide a solid basis for collaboration between institutions to develop. NIU staff had prepared this initiative well - the reason probably why so many community colleges participated and some others said they might join later - and there is now a process in place which, if followed through, will concretize the objectives and terms of the cooperation and create the necessary trust between the partners. Although the timescale set aside to address the presidents’ priorities may appear rather optimistic, it is also an incentive for the newly formed committee to get on with the task at hand swiftly and without delay.

Role of Post-secondary Higher Education Institutions - Division of Labour and Collaboration

There is some articulation between the various institutions of the post-secondary sector in Northern Illinois. 4-year institutions award the baccalaureate degree, but the 2- year community colleges award ‘associate’s degrees’, a widely recognized credential – either as recognition of having completed the first half of a baccalaureate OR as a credential in technical fields such as nursing, and manufacturing.

However, many and significant imperfections remain within the ‘articulation system’ linking 2- and 4-year institutions within Illinois – even if there is much attention being paid to the creation of a national ‘career pathway system’. This effort has gotten a lot of attention – but probably disproportionately on the side of community colleges. NIU’s “community college pathways” are meant to link NIU programs with community college programs which serve as a kind of ‘feeder



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

programs'. Useful as this may be, what seems to be needed is true engagement wherein the university moves itself into a position of being influenced and changed by the needs to the (labour) market, which are, often better understood by the community college sector.

Remarks hinted at a familiar and continuing cultural divide between the 'practical' community colleges and 'academic' universities. This divide, well known both in the US and internationally, is noteworthy given that NIU was created and continues to espouse a mandate as a 'regional' university committed to service its region through research, teaching and community service.

It should also be commented that although this regional mandate was not challenged by the deans who met with the CDG, the impression was given that neither was it wholeheartedly embraced across all the academic units within NIU. There was clearly a desire within NIU to raise its position with regard to research and professional training towards that of top ranking research universities. It was nevertheless accepted that the project to work more closely with community colleges and other relevant stakeholders should be supported.

In order to anchor the regional mandate and outreach activities firmly and clearly in the University's mandate it would seem appropriate as well as useful to amend NIU's mission statement. This would be a signal both to external partners and potential collaborators and the NIU leadership and staff that regional engagement is a mainstream responsibility, of equal importance and value as NIU's other missions.

Complexity of Governance and Difficulty in Establishing a Notion of the 'Region'

As has already been noted, there are very many public authorities and NGOs in the region concerned with labour market issues. Only a few of these, and partly overlapping, engage in any systematic and long term regional planning. Whilst these entities have working relations, it is not clear that they share a common vision and strategy for the economic development of the Northern Illinois region as a whole. Therefore, the regional vision and co-operative working relationships appear to be somewhat ambiguous, or at least not well formalised.

Nor was it clear to the CDG that the higher education sector had significantly engaged to date in that process. Economic development directors observed that they would do their jobs, including workforce development and developing education and training initiatives 'with or without' the assistance of universities and community colleges in the region. However the fact that most of them followed NIU's invitation to meet and discuss indicates that they would prefer that the education sector be involved.

The CDG understood that a lot of funding for workforce development programs comes from federal or state programs and legislation. As such it was seen as rather 'hit or miss', and often reactive (when people have become unemployed) rather than proactively focused on sustained workforce education and training for people who are working and want to advance their skills whilst working.

Effective Partnership Working

The CDG met with each of the key stakeholder groups separately: if all the stakeholder groups could meet together for a well-organised discussion of workforce development, economic development and education training needs opportunities in the region, it would be very probable they would identify many areas for greater co-operation. The potential seemed to be real, but there was clearly some way to go to develop trusted working relationships, and this will require time.



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

Any such process would be greatly aided by a well-managed visioning process, leading to better articulation of goals, and in turn to a better articulation of how to organise and plan to secure effective accomplishment of these goals.

It should also be a part of this process to examine funding models which would encourage collaborative activity rather than competition, as seems to be often the case at present. Innovation seemed sometimes to be confounded by funding issues, and stakeholders observed that things might happen differently if funding mechanisms could be developed which would allow innovative processes.

Future-proofing Skills Requirements

The CDG did not get the impression that there was a systematic underpinning which would enable future planning of educational and training provision, from regionally focussed analytical work on which to build a regional strategy. Analytical work was ad hoc, and often undertaken by local agencies and institutions to determine their own developmental priorities, looking to find their own way and identify their own opportunities. Clearly the Northern Illinois region as defined in this project contains areas with diverse economic profiles and development needs. In some respects, institutions saw competition as healthy, but there was a clear recognition that a wider regional perspective would bring advantages too, to institutional planning, and to the career opportunities for the population generally, not least in responding systematically to the influence of the Chicago metropolitan area close by.

Articulation of Programs

This issue has already been touched upon above, and it goes wider than the articulation of degree programs with college courses. It appeared to the CDG that community colleges would like to work in a more co-ordinated way with area high schools, and to have much clearer curricula organised around 'career pathways'. The need for such development was echoed by those agencies working to support those at risk of exclusion from the labour market who could find it difficult to properly advise individuals on the range of requirements to move progressively, through the education system as a whole.

The community colleges would also like to work more co-operatively and seamlessly with institutions such as NIU, to facilitate greater transferability for course credits, and to recognise links and matches between curricula areas covered well within community colleges and other study areas covered by NIU, for example matching education in a vocational area at college with management, entrepreneurship and professional education at university.

Any steps in the direction of increased articulation on a systemic basis across all sectors of education in the region would be seen as beneficial for workforce development, and eventually to developing a better education and skills training system for the region as a whole.

Challenges and Barriers

Workforce development has been identified by stakeholder groups as at the core of the region's future economic advancement. The primary goal then of the joint initiative is to bring area workforce skills more into line with existing and emerging needs of area employer and businesses, including addressing skill gaps at all levels - high and lower level skills, and, as was mentioned by several economic development people, to mid-level skills in particular. This would also contribute to the objective of reducing area poverty by bringing more people from lower income families into the work force or helping to elevate them when they are already employed and working.



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

There was an impression, however, that neither the presidents of the region's higher education institutions nor the various stakeholder groups know with any degree of precision what the needs of the new labour market really are and, hence, which skill gaps must be filled. Which are the demands of competences in the new jobs? How can these new jobs be attracted to the region? Only if stakeholders (who tend to have particular perspectives concentrating on particular sectors or target groups, for example small businesses or women) can agree on what is happening in the regional labour market, and which the real demands are, will it make sense to discuss, and eventually plan, how this collaborative arrangement can provide better and more targeted education and training programs. The current project of increasing cooperation between NIU and area community colleges is a good idea, but needs stronger foundations based on a new educational model that must be jointly developed and that is more appropriate for the jobs in the emerging economy. Such a new model would need to be proactive rather than just reactive.

To accomplish this, the collaborative needs to work closely not just with area community colleges but also with economic and workforce development officers and NGOs, sorting out what courses and curricula already exist, what needs to be added, and how the different HE institutions can better cooperate and coordinate in these offerings and degree programs.

The problem lies in how programming is now provided by HE entities, both by NIU and area community colleges. The challenge is finding ways to better coordinate these and to expand them where need and opportunity are greatest. This sounds like something all HEIs would be interested in pursuing, but there is considerable institutional rigidity to overcome, and the need for closer working relationships between the various institutions operating around a common vision and plan.

This will not be easy. Besides institutional rigidity, this will take considerable staff time and other resources. As one of the college representatives said in the meeting with the CDG: 'Collaboration often happens informally - formal agreements and their implementation and follow-up would cost too much staff time and are therefore impractical'. This was reflected by a dean's remark at the meeting with NIU senior staff: 'most faculty members have already a full plate, so they have to concentrate on core activities'. This bodes ill for the articulation and collaboration process if it will indeed be seen by senior administrators and faculty as 'marginal', i.e. an activity that can be left to informal and ad hoc processes, and to specialized units such as NIU's Center for Government Studies and the Office of Community College Relations (CCR).

Another important, in fact a central, question will be whether trust can be built between these institutions to identify and pursue an overall program. Also, can the various partners, in spite of their different missions and interests, agree on a common vision for the region; and can this vision guide articulation between the partners and a coordinated institutional design? Furthermore, can funding models to make such a program possible be devised and implemented?

What will determine this is what kind of a process the HEIs devise and pursue to address these questions and to build trust among participating institutions - also a process that allows other stakeholders to fully participate (educational organisations etc.). Staff from both CGS and CCR have indicated that they have formed a steering committee to help them plan this, and this is a very positive step. By the time of the next visit of the CDG in early 2010 this steering committee will have started its work, and should be making good progress.

Finally, even if the partners will build trust to work with each other and develop a common vision which could serve as the guide for articulation and coordinated programming, the process might not be sustainable if there are no incentives or at least some seed funding. Hence, NIU (and the colleges) will need to convince the state legislature, the governor, the IBHE and others that this collaborative plan is do-able and beneficial for the northern region, and should be supported by new funding patterns so that the (public) regional HE institutions are given incentives to cooperate.



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

In other words, the current process seems only sustainable in the longer run if there is recognition and funding from the state and potentially the federal government in addition to local-regional support). So far, the NIU approach seems more or less apolitical (remarks such as 'the state capital is far away, the governor in jail, the legislature not interested in HE', are indications of disillusion or distrust in politics and government). To start the collaboration process, as has been done, is important; however the CDG is of the opinion that it will probably not be sustainable if there is not some political support for it from local, state and federal authorities. Therefore, lobbying and PR for the initiative are important. The presidents of NIU and of one or two of the colleges who are well connected with the legislature or the governor's office should actively lobby and flag the NIU model.

This lobbying effort should probably not be limited to state and regional bodies. The newly founded consortium of NIU and community colleges should contact Illinois members of Congress with the double objective of making joint university-college programs eligible for workforce training funding, and highlighting the NIU initiative as a forward-looking regional model of university engagement in economic and social development that should not only be followed in Illinois but also emulated and promoted elsewhere in the US (the CDG is aware that education is not a federal responsibility, however labour and economic development are). This lobbying effort is not a role that the CGS can or should play by itself, but primarily a task for the university leadership, members of the University's Board of Trustees, the Illinois Board of Higher Education, the Illinois Community College Board, as well as local politicians who would need to be brought on board.

With such process and support the chances to actually implement NIU's ambitious plan of regional collaboration with community colleges and possibly other partners on workforce education has a good chance of succeeding, mainly because of the following factors:

Structure: With a Vice-President who oversees and strongly supports and oversees regional engagement and outreach, and the re-organisation a few years ago with the objective of increasing the University's regional impact, chances are good that the outreach and coordination efforts will move from the margin into NIU's mainstream activities. With that renewed focus NIU is well positioned to play a more pivotal role in the region and regional development. Moreover, NIU has a solid regional physical infrastructure such as the three education centres, and excellent regional networks, which can serve as a basis, together with central outreach units such as the CGS and the Office for Community College Relations, for engaging in increasingly better co-ordinated and efficient outreach activities.

People: Especially the CGS with its long-term links with municipal leaders seems very well positioned to provide a neutral forum for discussions with and among the various regional stakeholders. The CDG was very impressed by the skills with which the CGS and CCR staff managed the early stages of the process to engage with community colleges and saw every reason why the process should become successful.

Incentives: It is apparent that the Outreach program and the units operating under its umbrella cannot 'do it alone'. In order to make the collaborative initiative a success and make it sustainable, NIU staff across the whole University (and parallel in the community colleges) will need to do additional work, or to do things differently from before. For this to happen, incentives and changes in the working routine (and possibly work organisation) will be needed. Since the NIU president has taken a leadership role in the process of dialogue with the community colleges and (most of) the deans have said they will support the initiative, chances are good that incentives will be given and necessary changes within NIU will be made.

Resources: With the competition from top research universities in the state, both public and private, there appears to be little chance that, except in some specialties and niche subjects, NIU will be able to play on the same field as the institutions of the University of Illinois, especially as past and



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

present funding does not seem to support such development. NIU must therefore look for fresh revenues to make up for the reductions in state funding over past years, and the present initiative might provide some of such new revenues.

Cooperation by the college sector: The historically defined distinction between the missions of 2- and 4-year institutions can be improved through more deliberate revisions related to inter-institutional articulation and the relation of curricula to career pathway development. Institutions need to tackle the obstacles and remove gaps that hinder efficient student progress. This calls for the hard work of “getting things right” between institutions in order to serve students. Improving the coherence of the progression system, between community colleges and universities, does not mean that the prevailing institutional missions of the respective institutions need to be dismantled. The benefits of system integrity are expected to give learners a clearer pathway perspective and thus a better chance of succeeding, make institutions work in a more coordinated system-wide context, make HE in general more efficient and less costly, and produce a workforce that is educated and trained in accord with the region’s defined needs.

Support: While the IBHE has not (yet) been involved in the new initiative, the senior leadership of the Illinois Community College Board, and especially the Vice-President for Adult Education and Institutional Support, have shown strong interest and support. It will be part of the task of the Outreach team to get other stakeholders and their representatives involved, with the objective of building up more awareness and support for the new collaborative approach to labour force development. As mentioned before, additional political support from state and federal politicians may also be needed to make the initiative sustainable in the longer run.

The CDG advice for NIU and the collaborative can in a nutshell be summarised in eight points:

- NIU should anchor its regional engagement in its mission statement as a commitment and signal for both its own staff and (potential) regional partners.
- Continue offering a forum for the various stakeholders of the region to voice and discuss with others their vision of and interest in regional economic and social development.
- Work together toward a clear articulation of a vision for the region in line with the respective institutional objectives.
- Together with other regional partners, identify skill gaps, both existing and future.
- Develop an educational plan for the region, primarily focusing post-secondary education and training but including the high school system.
- Seek support for the initiative, both political and financial, from all levels of government in order to make it sustainable in the long run.
- As this process will take considerable time, be realistic with regard to schedules and benchmarking - but do not lose the momentum that has been built up so far.
- During the entire process, and together with the partners, exercise a realistic assessment and an appraisal of whether and to what extent the collaboration process is yielding the expected (and defined) results.



Observatory PASCAL

Place Management, Social Capital and Learning Regions

Persons Whom the CDG Met on the Visit

- Bradley Bond, Associate Dean, Graduate School.
- Paul Borek, Executive Director, DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation.
- Darcy Buchholz, Executive Director, Boone and Winnebago Workforce Investment Board.
- Virginia Cassidy, Vice President, Academic Planning & Development.
- Lori Clark, Coordinator of Agency Relations, NIU External Affairs.
- Rena Cotsones, Executive Director, NIU Community Relations.
- Paul Crawford, Director, NIU Community College Relations.
- Wally Czerniak, Associate Vice President, NIU Information Technology Services Robert Gleeson, Director, NIU Center for Governmental Studies (CGS).
- Patricia Gross, Executive Director, Metropolitan Chicago Information Center.
- John Grueling, President/CEO, Will County Center for Economic Development Toni Henle, Consultant, Women Employed.
- Richard Holly, Dean, College of Visual and Performing Arts.
- Roger Hopkins, Executive Director, Choose DuPage.
- Karen Hunter Anderson, Vice President for Adult Education and Institutional Support, Illinois Community College Board.
- Anne Kaplan, Vice President, NIU Administration and Outreach.
- Jennifer Keeling, Director of City Policy, Chicago Jobs Council.
- Candace King, Executive Director, DuPage Federation on Human Service Reform.
- Chris McCord, Dean, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences.
- Mark Podemski, Vice President for Development, Rockford Area Economic Development Council.
- Diana Robinson, Associate Director, CGS.
- Kurt Thurmaier, Professor, Public Administration.
- Promod Vohra, Dean, College of Engineering Norm Walzer, Senior Research Scholar, CGS.
- Lemuel Watson, Dean, College of Education.
- Ken Zehnder, Associate Director, NIU External Affairs.