

Regionalised Education Initiatives: A Model for Regional Social Capital and Economic Development

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Abstract

The reformation of education in Australia is currently being driven by Dr. Brendan Nelson's education reform agenda, as well as some individual state government reform initiatives. This article redefines the Nelson agenda and proposes a regionalized model, introducing heightened opportunities for social and economic benefit through an investment by local government, and the communities they represent, in this education reform process. The fundamental proposition underlying this paper is that partnerships brokered by local government between communities, state government, the federal government and the education industry can deliver highly relevant contemporary education and training outcomes that also contribute to the achievement of the regional vision. It follows that the provision of high quality tertiary education will also contribute to social capital and economic development by contributing to societal goals. Further, this tailored regional approach, in partnership with a community, and with strategically aligned visions and goals, would contribute to an even higher societal outcome in the form of a regional collective consciousness, or Meta-Civica. To capture such points the article investigates and challenges the roles and relationships of all three levels of government in education. It considers not only inter-governmental relationships and policy, but also the position of the education industry within a community, with particular attention paid to the Noosa Education Partnership model of collaboration between local government and education providers.

Introduction

There are shifting priorities in the economy today that are the consequence of historical change (Lynch 2003). In particular one set of priorities is the role education and training plays, in what commentators (Drucker 1999, Lynch 2003, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development 1996 and Thurrow 2000) argue, is an emerging Knowledge Based Economy, an economy that contrasts starkly with many previous, in that intangible 'knowledge', as opposed to raw materials, is the chief production commodity (Lynch 2003 and OECD 1996). These shifts represent new opportunities and new frontiers for all sectors of the economy, and local government is no exception. This paper is therefore para-educational in its perspective in that it contributes to the debate on education reform from the position of local government. This paper contends that local government can and should be a central partner in the education reform that is required to support such an economy. I will demonstrate through the Noosa model of education partnership how this can be achieved.

This paper begins with a brief introduction to an emerging knowledge based economy and enhanced regional social capital, where I give context to the sections that follow. In the following sections, I outline the positions that government takes, including a discussion about the Noosa model and the value of partnerships. In the concluding paragraphs I argue that a higher order outcome for communities is achievable within the framework of this model.

A Knowledge-Based Economy and Social Capital

According to Lynch (2003), the term 'Knowledge Economy' was coined by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in their report *The Knowledge-based Economy* (OECD 1996). In this economy there is development based on the production, distribution and use of knowledge and information. By comparison, the economy of the twentieth century relied predominantly on the sale of raw resources, commodities and primary processing to generate income and wealth. The key commodity in the knowledge economy, by contrast, is 'knowledge' and its use to create new products and services (Lynch 2003)

The Smart State strategy in Queensland (Queensland Government 1998) is one such example of governments coming to terms with a knowledge economy and the effects of globalisation.

Characteristics of the knowledge economy are man-made brain power industries, where there is rapid development, and the subsequent merging of new information and communication technologies, creating a global inter-connected economy; a circumstance that has come to be known as globalisation (Thurow 2000.) An effect of globalisation is an “increasing structural differentiation of such goods and assets, having spread across traditional borders and economic sectors, resulting in a greater influence of political and economic changes” (Lynch 2003, p.15). Here Lynch (2003) argues that governments of today are dispensing with their regulator role or the function of controlling their national economies “to become platform builders that invest in infrastructure, education and research and development, so as to allow their citizens to have the opportunity to earn world class standards of living” (Thurow 2000, p.11). The preferred outcome from such a strategy is heightened social capital and a sound, sustainable economic base. The social capital concept has been well defined as “the features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.” (Putnam 1993) The concept was further developed by The Australian Conservation Foundation, which states:

The development of social capital is an essential prerequisite for achieving an ecologically sustainable and socially just society. Promoting social capital - measured in terms of trust, community involvement in decision-making and a high level of voluntary association – means promoting people as members of a society and not just as instruments of the market. It also means that societal goals – environmental, social and economic – are shared goals that are achieved through a process of engagement and productive compromise.” (Australian Conservation Foundation 2000, p.2)

Putnam (1993) went further and identified a clear association between social capital and economic benefit. The outcomes of Putnam’s work are profound and, as commentators have observed, “social scientists are now obliged to add social capital to the list of key variables they consider, when trying to explain political and economic phenomena.” (Boix & Posner 1996, p2).

Government, the Agenda and the Noosa Model

In a knowledge economy era there is increasing recognition of the value of the contribution made by local government, as illustrated by the number of references to community and regions within the rhetoric from federal and state governments, economists, industry bodies and the education industry. (Longley 2005; Lynch 2002; Queensland Government 2004; Sirolli 2005). This recognition builds on the role local government has in raising the level of social capital within its regions.

The link between the social and economic elements was identified by Deakin University research, which showed that:

- 1) *Macroeconomic performance and human capital formation are interdependent;*
- 2) *There is a clear association between productivity at the national level and education and training; and*
- 3) *There is emerging evidence of a casual relationship between the two factors. (Deakin University, 1997, p.7)*

Putnam (1993) had also qualified and quantified these benefits and convincingly argued that the fundamentals of a sustainable society lay not only in political theory, but even more so in socio-economic relationships. “for economic progress (to occur) social capital may be even more important than physical or human capital.” (Putnam 1993). In practical terms, particularly from a local government perspective, this means more attention must be applied to community capacity building, rather than focussing on infrastructure for the benefit of individual members of a society. One of the essential tools for capacity building is education and learning, and Wenger (1998), spoke of collective learning within communities of practice, and identified these learning communities as self-organizing systems that have many of the benefits and characteristics of associational life, such as the generation of what Putnam (1993) described as social capital. The foundation to both a healthy civic culture as described by Sirolli (2005) and a knowledge-based economy is education. Lundvall and Borrás (1999) had also referred to a learning society and recognised that the capacity to learn is a generic skill for knowledge workers in knowledge industries. Bourdieu identified education as a part of a ‘cultural capital’ and a main source of modern societal success in his critical conflict theory. Further, Aubytner (1998) stated that,

the educational level of society is the crucial factor in the socio-economic development of every country. Investment in human capital is the most economical option for enhancing the competitive abilities of the national economy, and thereby increasing the rate of economic growth. (p.1)

The challenge before all levels of government therefore is to achieve, through reform, a vibrant and regionally relevant education industry that, when partnered with infrastructure provision and research and development, creates a platform for future regional development.

To properly explore local government's role in linking education to the community and its connection to social capital, one must first appreciate the debates that are occurring in the federal and state political arenas, so as to ascertain their influence and impact on regions. I will now focus on the federal debate.

At the federal government level there has been a significant commitment to the reformation of higher education nationally. Underpinning this reform is the Higher Education Report for the 2002 to 2004 Triennium, and it cites the purposes of higher education as contributing to the fulfilment of human and social potential, and the advancement of knowledge and social and economic progress. (Nelson 2004). Further, the report includes reference to inspiring and enabling individuals; capability building; workplace participation; and contributions to the local, regional and national level to aid the application of knowledge and understanding to the benefit of the economy and society.

The implications of this are that, to progress this reform, local governments must play a strategic role in the alignment of regional vision with this agenda so as to generate preferred community outcomes.

In turning to the State of Queensland, we have already seen that the State Government has recently reviewed its role in higher education through the Smart State policy, and specifically in the Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) - A White Paper. (Queensland Government 2002). This initiative is mainly focused on secondary schooling, transitional and pathway issues. However, state governments in Australia are clearly responsible for higher education issues, as set out in the national protocols that were agreed between the Australian, state and territory education ministers at the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in 2002. In fact, through these protocols the states and territories have the primary legislative responsibility for the establishment and oversight of higher education institutions, including the maintenance of standards through controls on the use of terms such as university and degree. This includes recognition of new universities, the operation of overseas higher education institutions in Australia and the accreditation of Higher Education courses to be offered by non self-accrediting providers. This is a critical factor in considering the regionalisation of higher education.

For this state reform to have relevance in a regional context, as with the federal initiative, local governments must be the lead agents in identifying appropriate higher education providers to achieve the local and regional economic and societal goals contained within their vision. Given the profile and context of a changing federal and state education policy environment, I now discuss this in relation to local government in Queensland and specifically identify three key elements, roles and responsibilities, relationships and reform.

Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of local governments in relation to the development of social capital are outlined in the Queensland Local Government Act 1993, which legitimises Local Government's involvement, and outlines requirements for councils to adopt a corporate plan addressing local and regional issues, including their role in economic development; community development and human services, arts and cultural development and environmental management. The Integrated Planning Act 1997 (Queensland Government 1997) outlines a statutory framework for local government to deliver on micro-elements of this legislation, including translation into a land-use planning scheme.

The interpretations of this Act are as varied as are councils in Queensland, as each council applies local solutions to local problems. As an exploratory exercise the Local Government Social Capital Research Project was initiated by the Local Government Association Queensland to demystify social capital and its important implications in Queensland. Moreover it attempted to align some of the claims of social capital theory with the practice of local governments, focusing specifically on their community development activities. The key findings were articulated under the headings Leadership, Communications, Learning, Collaborative Partnerships and Measurement. This work cements the link between social capital, the economy and those local governments that have made a commitment to a knowledge-based future.

What this means in real terms is that local governments have a responsibility to their community to engage in partnerships with higher education institutions that deliver specific components of education and training necessary to construct the platform for a knowledge-based learning community.

Relationships

The quality of the relationships between all levels of government in regard to delivering higher education directly impact on regional social capital and economic renewal. Local government is however the key catalyst in the partnership development for the purpose of creating community vision and the building of the platform.

The direct link and key catalysts in delivering outcomes from economic policy in local and regional economies are enterprise and entrepreneurship. Prosperous regions throughout the world exhibit the same patterns of economic development, namely a vibrant entrepreneurial sector supported by a civic culture that reassures the passion, imagination, energy and intelligence of its people. (Sirroli 2005, p.143)

Further, Sirolli identifies the important macroeconomic aspects affecting regions as education, communications and transport, and microeconomic factors such as facilitation and nurturing of individual enterprise and entrepreneurs. Historically only those societies that have evolved social conditions favourable to entrepreneurship prospered no matter what the initial resource base of that country was. (Sirolli 2005)

Through the reform process the opportunity to deliver highly relevant local and regional outcomes becomes available. This process takes significant steps forward (in its rhetoric at least), forging distinct missions within the overall system and through greater collaboration between individual universities and other education providers, industry, business, regions and communities. (Australian Government 2003) The issue for local governments and the communities they represent is to be respected and supported in their roles to freely achieve their own particular visions. This could be achieved in partnership with higher educational institutions of choice, to deliver high quality, relevant educational opportunities for the purpose of social and economic benefit and the longer-term sustainability of their communities.

Reform

Much of government's reform intent and process developed over the past decade has been internalised education industry reform (Lynch & Smith 2002, Hargreaves 1997 and Ryan 1998) and, although the state government in Queensland is clearly positioned to deliver reform at the higher education level through its regional structure, relationships and relationships guidelines with local government remain limited. Further, an even gloomier picture has been painted for Australian education reform. Comparing the public funding of Australian universities since 1995 with the OECD region as a whole, Australia was one of only five OECD countries, where funding fell in real terms, dropping by 5%. (Considine, Marginson, Sheehan & Kunnick 2001)

Local governments recognise that they have significant work in front of them to develop essential working relationships.

Despite the flurry of activity that has accompanied both academic writing and reports from project funding based on social capital building objectives, there is still little that specifically draws attention to the role of local government in relation to social capital.
(L.G.A.Q. 2001)

It is essential for regional development, through higher education reform, that those communities that recognise the value of a shared vision and working partnerships are supported in their efforts to progress this essential platform for their future. This is doubly true for regional and rural universities, as Longley (2005) illustrates:

Universities in regions represent a very large investment by the Federal Government - \$1 billion each year, but in many cases they are struggling. Those that are thriving are doing so because their Local and State Governments and local industry recognise the rewards of investing in them and partnering with them, with impact multipliers of between 6 and 8 times. These campuses have the capacity to make a real difference to the economic futures of regions but their needs to be a culture change. (p. 13)

The Noosa Education Partnership Model

The 'Noosa Model', as I refer to it and as it is described, is based on strategic partnerships between the local government, higher education, industry and the community for the purpose of social capital and sustainable economic development outcomes. In this section I review the model and its development, with particular emphasis on education as a partner.

In 1997 Noosa Council adopted the Strategic Plan, a land use based planning scheme that was innovative in its structure, content and initiatives in that the plan would respect the environmental values and lifestyle values of the shire above other considerations. This was done to preserve the unique and fragile geography of the region. The plan was translated into a document that identified the principal tool for the delivery of such values as development control. Subsequently, it became known to the general public as the population cap. By the year 2000 the effects of this plan and its strategies were evident. Demographic trends were the most outstanding of these impacts, with a steady growth in the population of over 45-year olds. In 2001 42.6% of the population was over 45 years. In fact by 2003, 15 to 24 year olds made up only 9.3% of the total population. Research indicated that by 2021 half the population of Noosa would be over 45 years. Further it was shown that for every young person who left the region for higher education \$40,000 was lost from the local economy annually (1998 figures). The median individual income remained in the \$200-\$299 per week bracket from 1996 to 2000, while the poverty line increased from \$237 to \$294 per week. The retail and hospitality industries were the largest employers at 30% of total employment, and youth unemployment rose from 24% in 1996 to 29.9% in 2001 for 15 to 24 year olds. (Sunshine Coast Regional Economic Development Board 1998 and Youth Commitment Partnership 2003).

These statistics highlighted the unbalanced nature of the community's direction under the strategic plan, which favoured environmental issues over social capital and economic development. These and other disturbing social trends triggered research into social and economic models that would fit within the overall intent of the Noosa vision. Subsequent research highlighted the advantages, both social and economic, of developing an integrated higher education industry in partnership with the community, as identified by Porter.

Education and training constitute perhaps the single greatest long-term leverage point available to all levels of government in upgrading industry. Improving the general education system is an essential priority of government, and a matter of economic and not just social policy. As important is setting policies that link the education system to industry and encourage industry's own efforts at training (Porter 2001)

Further, it has been identified that the economic contribution of the university sector as measurable in three ways

1. *The income and employment generated in the nation through its teaching and research activities, including generation of export income (Wollongong University is recognised as making both a direct and an indirect impact of \$13M per day into the region). (Campbell 2005)*
2. *The enhancement of the nation's human capital through its education of university graduates. (Charles Sturt University research shows that 70% of all graduates from regional universities stay in the region)*
3. *The creation of wealth through the spill-over effects to government and business of education research and development activities. (Business and Higher Education Round Table 2000)*

Noosa's directions post-1997 culminated in a complete restructure of the organization. This led to the establishment of a new Business Directorate and the new positions of Economic Strategies and Innovations Manager, as well as Community Development and Youth Development Managers. A triple bottom line (a balanced consideration of economic, social and environmental perspectives on any issue) philosophy was employed to gird its decision-making, and innovation and entrepreneurship were written into the vision and corporate plan. Further developments in 2000 included a new community board governance model in which community panels advised Council in areas of economic, social, environmental, arts and heritage and tourism issues. Noosa committed itself to a knowledge-based economy, with creative industries as a major component of the strategy, forming the basis for the Noosa model. In progressing this initiative partnerships were formalised in this relationship building exercise with Noosa Youth Services, Rural Futures Network, Sunshine Coast University, Central Queensland University, and the Youth Commitment Partnership, all through Memoranda of Understanding. Further, in 2005 the Creative Noosa Unit was established.

A vital component of the Noosa model was a strategy to formalise a focus on higher education within the council organization and the Learning Education and Research Network (LEARN) was formed. This became the Council's vehicle to support the development of higher education outcomes such as the Noosa Hub, an innovative division of Central Queensland University delivering the Bachelor of Learning Management in the village of Pomona utilizing the village as a campus (Lynch 2002). This built upon research which identified historical examples of communities prospering through a strategy of investing in higher education, as in 11th Century Bologna right through to the modern Irish (1980's) and Korean (1990's) models (Florida 2003 and Putnam 1992).

As Florida asserts,

Less than two decades ago Ireland had a tired economy suffering from high unemployment, stagnant incomes and a constant brain drain of its best and brightest. However, today the Irish economy is the fastest growing in the OECD - boasting a roaring technology sector and productivity levels amongst the highest in Europe.
(Florida 2003)

By investing in the education industry Ireland bolstered its ability to both generate and attract talent. This strategy had a significant positive effect not only on the economy but also on the demographic imbalance caused by the brain drain. Florida identified this group of best and brightest as the *creative class*, and identified them as people working in areas of science, engineering, architecture and design, education, the arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and new creative content. The importance of working partnerships between industry and the broader community, as well as taking advantage of the regional lifestyle environment cannot be underestimated in the implementation of these strategies. Florida identified that these creative workers clustered in places possessing an attractive lifestyle.

From classical Athens and Rome to the Florence of the Medici and Elizabethan London, to Greenwich Village and the San Francisco Bay area, creativity has always gravitated to specific locations. (Florida 2003, p.8)

It is argued that the Sunshine Coast and Gold Coast have been identified as the leading lifestyle regions in Australia further positioning Noosa to take advantage of the knowledge economy phenomena. (Wilson, Bycroft, McGregor, 2004).

This reliance on lifestyle, and not on a natural resource base as a precursor to a robust economy, forms the basis of Noosa's knowledge economy vision.

The Partnerships

The quality of interaction between local government, education and training, industry and the community will directly impact on the level of success of a learning society's development. In this section I focus on the value of partnerships within these sectors as a key element to achieving this interaction.

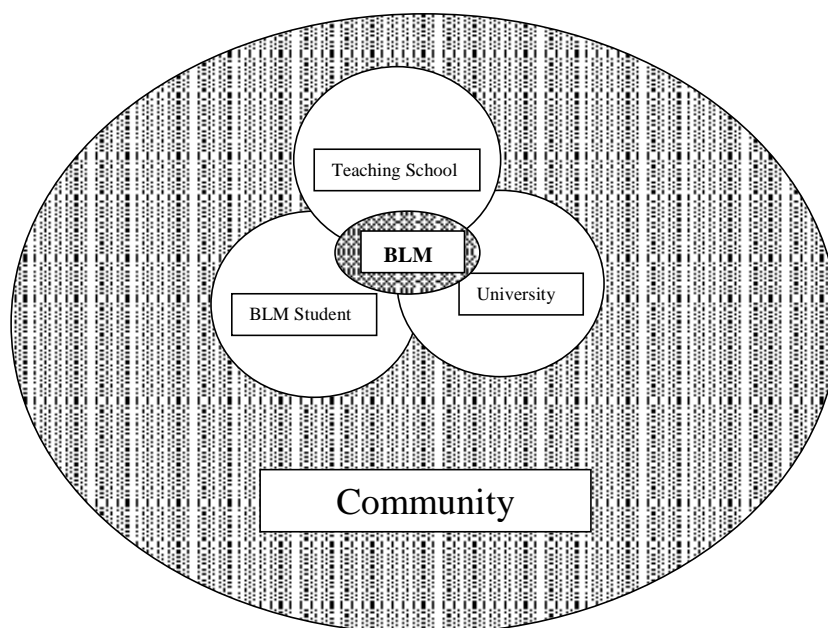
In his study on the economic and social divide between Northern and Southern Italy, Putnam (1993) identified the most vibrant Italian region as Emilia-Romagna, centred around the city of Bologna. Emilia-Romagna has sustained a healthy community and economy for over 1,000 years and has consistently been in the top ten European regional economies. It was by design and through local government policy that Bologna developed the first university in Europe in the 11th century, a strategy specifically aimed at creating a knowledge economy. In the two years following the university's establishment 4,000 of Europe's brightest scholars and academics went to Bologna to live and study Law, Medicine, Engineering and Arts, in a university that was run by the students and the community (Renzi 1996).

The positioning of higher education as a regional partner relies on an understanding of the views held by educators themselves. In their paper, *New Teacher Education for a New Age*, Lynch and Smith (2003) identified two dominant views of education and the role it plays. The first is that a knowledge economy, driven by technology, has the potential to reverse trends in differential access to educational resources, and confers on students an increased set of skills and opportunities. (Binge 1998, Groennings 1997). The second view is that an increased linkage between education and the economy is an element of global capitalist hegemony, that weakens non-market values of humanitarianism, equity and ecology. In their view Lynch and Smith claim education ought to generate resistance to marketisation (Chafy 1997, DeVaney 1998, and Moran & Self 1999).

Clearly then the former view is most valuable in the development of a new economy. The challenge for educators is to recognise their proactive role in achieving a regional vision, and not to consider their education reform in the context of reacting to outside influences that may impact internally on their industry. Effective proactive education reform is evidenced in Noosa through the commitment of Central Queensland University and the Bachelor of Learning Management degree, delivered in the small rural township of Pomona, utilising existing Education Queensland infrastructure and numerous schools throughout the region. (Lynch, Smith, & Mienczakowski 2003) This degree course not only reforms the development of undergraduate students around issues of learning management and lifelong learning skills, but is also a model for partnerships with the relevant industry (education), the community, and the local government. The success of this model has been recognised by the Federal Minister of Education, Dr. Brendan Nelson, as this quote illustrates:

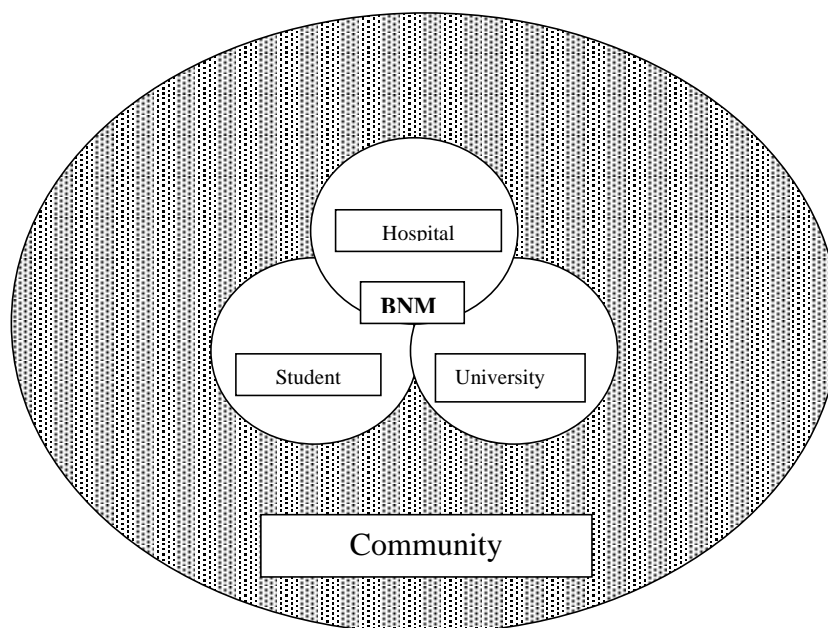
The number 1 priority in schooling is to raise the respect society has for teaching as a profession, including support in setting and maintaining its own performance standards. I am impressed with Central Queensland University's 'bachelor of learning management' which specially prepares teachers for the rigours of the classroom and a life of professional learning. (Nelson 2005)

Figure 1: Noosa BLM Model



The framework for the BLM is transferable, and provides an innovative ‘platform’ for the development of other courses, the content of which is considered vital to the region’s development. Figure Two which illustrates the Bachelor of Nursing Management exemplifies this point.

Figure 2: Noosa BNM Model



Note : Based on the Noosa Model of the BLM program as developed by Lynch 2005.

With an ageing demographic Noosa’s community will rely on quality health care. The framework is easily transferred to the nursing/ health care/ aged care industry. The development of partnerships with hospitals, health practitioners, service providers and the broader community will deliver on this vital societal issue, as well as make a valuable contribution to the Noosa model. Central Queensland University’s Noosa Hub has already made a significant contribution to a knowledge economy, supported by a structured partnership based on a shared vision that has the potential to reverse negative social trends and a fragile narrow based economy.

For the advancement of this strategy, which forms the basis of the Noosa model, the position that must be taken by educators is to consider themselves as industry-based partners, not just teachers. Through their contributions to a regional vision, they will play a vital and proactive role in creating a sustainable community. Regional relevance, as well as internal reform of the education industry is required, otherwise little will change. Nevertheless it should be recognised that *“the light of innovation and critical foresight has not shone brightly on either policy, pre or post-service teacher education or administration in the last few decades.”* (Lynch & Smith 2002, p.3)

The key characteristics of effective engagement between higher education and communities have been identified as, when the partners see *“their present and future well-being as intrinsically linked, engage in reciprocal learning, respect the history, culture, knowledge and wisdom of the other; create structures that promote open communication and equity with one another, value and promote diversity, and regularly conduct a joint assessment of their partnership and report results”* (W.K. Kellogg Foundation 2002, p.51).

Longley (2005) identified two key changes required through education reform that will provide the capacity for regional campuses to make a real difference to economic futures.

1. *A university’s regional commitment needs to be recognised and rewarded by the federal government – currently campuses are funded per student, regardless of a university’s degree of engagement with the community.*
2. *Local and State Governments and Industry need to continue to recognise that universities in regions are not simply a Federal Government responsibility, they are a huge resource that will either flourish or fail, depending on the level of the local commitment and support that they receive and the strength of that ongoing relationship.*

A university’s engagement with its region can take many forms but it will only be able to have a powerful transformational effect if the campus partners with its community and explicitly works with all layers of the community towards the same strategic goals. Similarly the community needs to work with and support its own campus in practical and tangible ways at every opportunity. (Longley 2005, p.1)

The working partnership that has been developed in Noosa between Noosa Council, CQU - Noosa Hub, youth commitment partnership, industry and the community, and which makes up the Noosa model, is delivering positive outcomes to the region, both socially and economically. In simple terms, to date, approximately 500 students have completed, or are completing, studies at the Noosa Hub. As there was no previous option for attending a university in Noosa, the CQU Noosa Hub can be directly credited with contributions of over \$15M to the local economy, based on Regional Economic Development Board calculations (1998).

Additional benefits are seen in the retention and attraction of the brightest and best to Noosa, and a contribution to the balancing of demographic trends, as well as the immediate integration of students, through the BLM framework, into a mentored workplace situation. This situation ultimately contributes to the development of cross-generational trust and tolerance. Further research shows that, within the Sunshine Coast, Noosa Shire has recorded the strongest decline in youth unemployment between 1991 and 2001, down from 33.0% to 21.1% in this period (Sunroc, AEC group 2004-5; Dusseldorp Skills Forum Report, 2005).

In her presentation to the Regional Economies Conference in Mandurah 2005 Professor Kateryna Longley identified many of the problems facing regional universities. At the same time she highlighted the fine contribution Murdoch University has made to the Mandurah and Rockingham regions in Western Australia. However, this has been achieved at a considerable cost - \$15.5M for buildings and infrastructure in Mandurah to 2008, \$25M for buildings and infrastructure in Rockingham. The value of partnerships in this Western Australian example is highly regarded and the analogy of 'marriage' is used to describe the extent of integration between partners.

Through its unique partnership model the CQU Noosa Hub has reduced capital outlays significantly, and has therefore freed up valuable funds for high quality innovative and regionally relevant programming. This successful project is the result of a marriage between partners and also incorporates the small township itself as a ready-made campus, with planning underway to utilise other available infrastructure in the Noosa Shire. These opportunities present themselves through the memoranda of understanding (deed of marriage) and identify for all partners the full value of the shared vision and associated cross benefits, including multi use of facilities, and reduced capital outlays for higher education infrastructure.

It is an easy trap for players to focus on the provision of infrastructure in the early stages of development of a new regional university and this point has been convincingly argued:

Infrastructure development, however, cannot replace entrepreneurship. No matter how sophisticated the local infrastructures may be, without people using them they are useless...there has to be a second leg to economic and community development which balances the strategic one. This is the bottom-up responsive leg, which captures the motivation and imaginative intelligence of local passionate individuals who wish to engage in bona fide economic activities (Sirrolli 2005,p.3).

Meta-Civica

In this paper I propose that there is a higher-order outcome, above that described by Wenger (1998) as 'communities of practise', and Lundvall and Borrás' (1999) 'learning society', achievable through the partnerships and strategies identified within this paper. Emile Durkheim argued that modern societies behave as do the organs of the body. Individuals perform certain specific functions, but rely on the well-being and successful performance of other individuals. This reliance upon each other for social and physical survival is the source of organic solidarity.

If we accept the principles of these theories and consider the Emilia-Romagna model of a sustainable society, (recognising the contribution of the Bologna University as a significant organ within this body) and Longley's 'marriage' in Western Australia, it is not difficult to identify a higher order outcome through society's collective consciousness, or a Meta-Civica. This is the case in Emilia-Romagna where, with limited raw materials, over one quarter of its people are entrepreneurs working with nearly 8,000 co-operatives to drive a sustainable economy and community as they have for more than 1000years. (Renzi 1996)

With a small population of 45,000 people and little in the way of natural resources other than its pristine environment, Noosa has few options, and could do well to draw on the Bologna experience. Failure to embrace such a strategy would leave this community exposed through a fragile and largely monocultural economy. The focus on the knowledge economy and creative industries in regions has determined the need for highest order education, selected from the world's best providers of the appropriate and relevant courses, and only from those who are prepared to commit to a marriage. Putnam, (1993) observed,

In a community rich in social capital, where norms and networks are visible and strong, progressive economic development is apparent. Civic and community engagements are a precursor for economic growth, and social connectedness is fundamental to the development of effective social, economic and public policy.

As Putnam (2000) pointed out in his observations on relationships between civic associations and social capital, the resultant effect is circularity; and community cooperation and social capital breed one another in an upwardly spiralling motion or *virtuous circle*.

Virtuous circles result in social equilibria with high levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement and collective wellbeing. These traits define the Civic Community.
(Putman 2000, p.170).

In defining the necessary steps for the renewal of stocks of social capital in America, Putnam, (2000) recommends beginning this process with a focus on the education of youth; again reinforcing the value of universities. Combined with his concept of “bridging social capital” and the evidence of the economic benefits of education, it is not unreasonable to see that a higher order society can be planned for, and achieved.

The importance of quality university participation in this vision is once again recognised by Florida.

Universities are the intellectual hubs of the creative economy. They do indeed service our society as technological and scientific laboratories, but they are much more than that. They also do a remarkable job of fostering the other two “T’s” of economic growth, Talent and Tolerance. (Florida 2005, p.292).

In case after case, he found that creative centres occur when states and communities were forward-looking enough to support great institutions of higher education. The educational element of the Noosa Model, provided in the first instance by CQU Noosa Hub, provides a key catalyst to socio-economic outcomes and the Meta-Civica vision.

Conclusion

As I have shown, local government has a significant role to play, and contribution to make, in developing higher education and university participation in regions.

This positive strategy will not progress without significant cultural change at all levels of government and within the education industry itself. The federal reform of education must respect the role of local government in brokering partnerships between universities, industry and the community. Policy change and greater funding support must be tailored and made accessible in support of higher education initiatives in regions, particularly those that contribute through partnerships toward regional societal goals.

The state governments and territories need to further consider through intra government review and reform their role in higher education in regional Australia. States and territories need to ensure that all relevant departments such as state development, education, small business, regional communities, information technology, industry and others are committing to a proactive whole of government approach to this vital issue. This needs to be on a fair and equitable basis for all regions, free of political bias, for the benefit not only of the regions but the states, territories and the nation as a whole. As an example the Education Queensland regional offices could easily be catalysts for university development in regional Queensland in association with local governments, and not just agencies for internal education industry issues.

Local governments themselves must understand the full value of engaging in higher education, and be prepared to resource a strategy that will provide a platform for regional development. Universities also need to properly resource their regional programs. Communities within a 'lifestyle region' should not be seen as a cash cow for the central campus through the attraction of fee paying students. It is essential that a universities commitment to regional development, in partnership with the local government, must be their regional *raison d'être*, and not a front to redirect income from foreign students and postgraduate fee paying programs back to central office at the expense of the regional economy.

Further, the partnerships within this strategy must be recognised as the essential element in progressing higher order outcomes. By recognising the regional community vision, by supporting high quality education and by brokering partnerships with relevant organizations, local government can be the facilitator of Meta-Civica.

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