

# The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



## Chamber of Regions

**14th PLENARY SESSION**  
**CPR(14)2REP**  
24 April 2007

### Universities and regional development

Farid Mukhametshin, Russian Federation, (R, ILDG) and  
Alfons Vogtel, Germany, (R, EPP/CD)

Explanatory memorandum  
Committee on Culture and Education

#### Summary :

Universities are playing an increasing role in regional cultural development, but more can be done to realise their potential in this respect. Universities have always had a major impact on cultural life. They are strategically placed to stimulate cultural development and to preserve regional identities. As institutions responsible for developing and enlarging the knowledge and competencies of citizens, universities are uniquely positioned in this respect.

The report recommends that steps be taken to make best use of universities to preserve the cultures of the surrounding regions, using their research capacities and specialised knowledge. Recognition also needs to be given to universities' role in transfrontier cooperation, increasing student and academic mobility and generating cultural and economic benefits for their regions.

R : Chamber of Regions / L : Local Chamber  
ILDG : Independent and Liberal Democrat Group  
EPP/CD : European People's Party – Christian Democrats Group  
SOC : Socialist Group  
NR : Member not belonging to a Political Group of the Congress



This report will examine how, in the European context, universities act as a motor for regional cultural development, and how the conditions for this role can be optimised. Universities have been fundamentally involved in the cultural life on regional, national, and European levels throughout their history. The current state of the affairs poses some new challenges and offers some new means for involvement in the regional cultural development, but the essence of this relationship lies at the heart of the idea of university.

## **1 Universities as generators of knowledge and competences**

With some exceptions (such as the United Kingdom), most European countries do not have a legal definition of a university. However, the term is commonly used to denote higher education institutions which offer first degree and usually second degree courses in a wide range of disciplines and combining teaching with research activities.

The basic role of universities throughout their history has been the generation, transfer and transformation of knowledge. Especially since the strategic goal of knowledge-based society was set in March 2000<sup>1</sup>, the achievement of the high level of competence has been articulated as one of the basic objectives of higher education in Europe. The raising awareness of importance of investment in intangible human and social capital has highlighted the issue of social responsibility of universities in designing their agenda with respect to the priorities and particularities of their social, economic, cultural environment. Although the stress in this respect has been laid upon the requirements of the information society, a high level of competence is also required in the social and cultural arena, in order to promote the quality of life. Consequently, universities play a substantial role not only in the improvement of technical skills and knowledge in a society, but also in the enhancement of competence in social and cultural interaction.

## **2 Cultural development**

Cultural development can be understood in a narrow sense, where culture is viewed in terms of traditional artistic activities, or a broader sense, where culture is linked to social identity and participation in the public process. This report will use a wide definition. For the purposes of this report, cultural development is defined as "the process by which human beings acquire the individual and collective resources necessary to participate in public life". In this perspective cultural development is closely connected with the concept of a healthy democracy, enabling individuals to participate fully in public life and civic society. It follows that there are clear social and political implications to cultural development. It is therefore closely connected to education for citizenship. Universities, in their capacity of generators of knowledge and competences in social interaction, are intimately involved in the process. The strategic role of universities in this respect was underlined in the Plantan report "Universities as sites of citizenship and civic responsibility" (CD-ESR(2002)2). The Plantan report highlights a number of ways in which universities contribute to the political culture of the surrounding area (student life, political environment of universities, relations with local authorities). Furthermore, the processes of building and articulating cultural identities, as constitutive parts of cultural development, are also linked to universities as institutions and members of faculty in their capacities of teachers and researchers alike.

## **3 Social responsibility of researchers**

In the field of humanities – the academic disciplines in charge of research into cultural phenomena, especially over the last couple of decades, the stress has been laid upon the social and political responsibility of researchers in producing the academically verified narratives influencing the formation of cultural identities. The basic line of the argument is that the inferences reached upon by the scholars and offered to the general public, form a substantial part of the generally accepted and perpetuated notions and values built into the communal identity. Therefore, the researchers involved in the study of culture decisively determine the cultural development, both on the grounds of their position as scholars, and as members of the academic community. Furthermore, universities develop human resources of the region, provide and control the membership of professional communities. Through

---

<sup>1</sup> Lisbon European Council, conclusions of the presidency, 24 March 2000

influence and actions of their graduates, universities perpetuate their social and cultural involvement with the regional community.

#### **4 Regional development**

Regional development can refer to the development of regions within a single country, or to the cooperation across national borders between regions with common characteristics. This report considers both types of regional development. Most studies of regional development focus on economic development. While this report concentrates on cultural development, it cannot be denied that there exist strong and complex links between the two. Universities also play an important role in regional economic development: they attract resources to a region, help to stem the brain drain and provide a research base for industry. In many respects, cultural activities and cultural industries benefit directly from this economic development.

#### **5 Universities as catalysts of cultural development**

Historically universities have played an important role in the region in which they are located. The regional role of universities is often understated and not well understood, although they are an important focus and catalyst of a region's development. They also often initiate cross-border regional cooperation. On the other hand, most universities are part of a national education system, and are therefore implementing national policies. In this respect they may actually be contributing to reducing regional differences.

#### **6 Universities as accountable regional agents**

The potential and responsibility to influence the cultural development, both on regional and more general level, bears with it the potential for the universities to position themselves as fully accountable and productive agents of their regional communities. The success of universities in taking an active part in the cultural development of their respective environments is equally beneficent both for the institutions and their regional partners.

#### **7 Marginalized universities**

The reluctance to face public responsibility leads to the marginalization of academics, in social, cultural, political and economic terms. The resulting distance leads to the isolation of universities and their gradual detachment from the community. The consequence is the further loss of influence and esteem, reflected among other in decreasing enrollment. Under these conditions, the motivation from the side of the community to participate financially in university affairs may also rapidly decrease. Apart from the negative consequences for the universities themselves, the omission to fully harness their resources in cultural development also affects the cultural climate of the regional community and the process of articulation of regional cultural identity.

#### **8 Regional cultural identity**

The term identity, although in frequent usage both in academic and popular discourse, is not unequivocally defined. Here it is used to denote an individual's identification with broader groups on the basis of characteristics socially perceived as significant. Along these lines, regional cultural identity entails the perceived feeling of belonging to a community in terms of co-residence, language, tradition, cultural practice, origins, religious and/or ethnic affiliation. Since it encompasses some of the basic elements of self-identification, regional cultural identity is a very potent source of motivation for social and political action. Referring to it, communities can be mobilized in creative and productive directions, but also in extreme practices of exclusion.

## **9 Cultural development and political stability**

In the regions of Europe where there are still acute conflicts and tensions, generated from ethnic and cultural distance, cultural development is intimately linked to the vital issue of political stability, human rights and safety. This is the case with the South East European countries, currently in the process of transition, but similar conditions are operating in Northern Ireland as well. More often than not, the political and even the military clashes have been motivated by the feelings of unsurpassable cultural differences, and the claims of the conflicting parties, territorial included, are founded upon historical rights. It is the role of the universities, and the researchers in the field of humanities in particular, to promote a well-balanced and impartial account of the regional cultural heritage and advocate the ideas of cultural pluralism.

## **10 Cultural pluralism**

One indicator of a mature society is its ability to sustain cultural pluralism. Regional cultural development includes not only the development of a cultural identity that is specific to a given region, but also the broadening of the cultural potential of the population as a whole, their access to cultural facilities, as well as the range of cultural products, programmes and facilities which are put at their disposal, whether they identify with the dominant culture or with a minority culture. Cultural development includes not only the dominant culture and the more prominent minority cultures, but also the means available to immigrants to enable them to express themselves and pursue their own cultural activities.

## **11 Potential resources and means of action**

In meeting the challenge of taking an active and productive part in the regional cultural development, universities have at their disposal several effective sets of resources and possible means of action.

### **Financial resources**

The presence of a university can have a huge impact on the economic life of a city. By nature they attract and accumulate resources. Universities are also magnets of patronage in the forms of donations and legacies.

A study of the bids for the European Capital of Culture 2008 concluded that having vibrant universities in the city with strong partnerships with the municipality was a prerequisite for a successful bid. (*"Helen Carter "The brains behind the bids". - The Guardian, 3 June 2003*).

### **Intellectual capital**

The university embodies a pool of intellectual capital in its teaching and research staff. The involvement of university academics with cultural organisations and industries takes place on several levels and often in the form of informal links. These links need to be recognised, encouraged and facilitated, as an important aspect of university life.

### **Human resources**

By their nature, universities represent the most highly trained and skilled portion of the population of the region. The faculty is submitted to regulated and timed evaluation procedures and accredited accordingly. Through their teaching, they directly influence a substantial part of the young. Publishing and presenting to the general public the results of their research, they reach out to the much wider audience. Some university departments promote research in the surrounding region, affording opportunities of strategic partnerships with local industries and businesses.

The students, while still in the process of academic training, are culturally, socially and politically active in their own right, while graduates take up positions in all venues of cultural and social life of the regional community. The values and ideas that they have been exposed to during their academic training form the base for their future cultural and social engagement.

Furthermore, a university naturally concentrates a large number of young people in a limited geographic area. Students are among the main consumers of cultural and recreational facilities. Furthermore, a significant proportion of students settle near the university and maintain their links with it. As consumers, students can have a big impact on local culture. Local cultural programmes are influenced by the student market. Students also create their own cultural associations and generate their own activities. As students are often more critical than the average cultural consumer, this can encourage art forms that are more demanding of their audiences, such as contemporary music festivals and specialist cinemas.

### **Preventing brain drain**

Increased internal mobility is a feature of modern societies. For professional workers, a major factor in deciding whether to live in a given location is the presence of good educational opportunities in the vicinity. Since universities often act as motors of economic development, and generate secondary industries, often linked to their research facilities, they create their own labour market, providing jobs for people with a high level of education. In remote regions, the presence of a university can be a major factor in encouraging people to stay in a remote region, thereby contributing to its development, rather than to migrate to the capital.

### **Conferences**

Universities occasionally organise conferences to examine aspects of the culture of the region in which they are situated. Sometimes these events are peripheral to the main university activities, taking the form of summer schools, seminars aimed at tourists and other activities promoted by the university to maximize its facilities during the academic vacations.

### **Media**

Printed and electronic media on regional and national level are in constant need for expert opinions on cultural matters. In this respect too, the academics need to meet the demands of their cultural, social and political position of the members of the community recognized as arbiters of cultural values.

### **Material resources**

Many universities develop their own cultural facilities, such as theatres, cinemas and art galleries. Although sometimes restricted to students and teaching staff, more often these facilities are available for local artists and performers and open to the general public. Campuses have the potential of a lively and attractive location for formal and informal interaction with the local community.

#### *Libraries, archives and museums*

It is of the nature of universities to develop large libraries, archives and special collections for their users, both as a research base and also to support their teaching programs. While these collections may be of immense cultural value, they are often underexploited. University libraries should be open to the public: a system should be put in place and advertised whereby members of public can obtain membership of a library at an appropriate cost. Care should be taken to facilitate online public access to library and museum catalogues, to enable the public to identify items of interest.

Universities could also give attention to digitizing their resources and making them available online, especially those which are heavily used, in a fragile condition, or inaccessible because of their value. The cost of such projects is sometimes heavy for a university to bear. If the general public stands to benefit from such digitisation, consideration could be given to identifying possibilities of joint funding initiatives with local and regional bodies.

Consideration could be given to rationalising resources between university museums and libraries and municipal museums and libraries. This could involve joint acquisition policies, sharing specialised equipment, suppliers and expertise in areas such as conservation and computer applications.

### *Case study: Kazan State University (KSU)*

This university in Russia possesses a unique combination of different museums. KSU museums enjoy an international reputation for their quality, and information on their collections can be found in international catalogues and reference books. These collections are used for educational, research and cultural purposes by university staff, as well as by people of the city and the Republic of Tatarstan.

[The Botanical Museum](#) was established by Karl Fuchs and complemented by the collection of Prince Potemkin, donated by Emperor Paul I to the Kazan Imperial School in 1798. Later the large collections of abbot de Grenadier (1,500 pieces) and Ruprecht (6,500 pieces) were added, to be joined by other collections. [The Edward Eversman Zoology Museum](#) similarly arrived at KSU as a part of the Prince Potemkin's unique collection and was used for teaching by Fuchs and other early professors. Today, it boasts over 50,000 exhibits, giving a complete view of the diversity of wildlife from unicellular organisms to primates, thus occupying one of the most important places among Russia's natural museums.

The Ethnographic Museum was started under the auspices of the University's Oriental Department. During the 1st half of the 19th century numerous articles from the Pacific, Mongolia, Tibet and China were collected. The Museum's most exemplary collection is that of the artefacts characterizing the ways of life of different peoples of Russia, especially Siberia and the multiethnic Volga region. In this respect, it is a one-in-a-kind museum with an outstanding collection regarding Volga ethnic groups such as the Tatars, Chuvashs, Mari, Mordva and Udmurts.

[The Archaeological Museum](#) started in 1810, when its first coins and rarities were acquired; by the mid 19th century it had one of the biggest numismatic collections in Europe. The main exhibition presents wide-ranging illustrations of general archaeology, anthropology, ancient and medieval history and the history of archaeological science in Kazan. [The Alexander Stuckenberg Geology Museum](#) is one of the most famous and richest natural museums, being one of the top three such university museums in Russia. It was established in 1804 and now comprises over 100,000 articles from 60 countries, including collections of meteorites, rocks and fossils of ancient plants and animals.

[The Museum of the Kazan School of Chemistry](#) was first founded in 1863 as the Alexander Butlerov Cabinet-Museum. It is the only museum of a whole chemical research field to be found in the entire world. Scholars who have worked in this museum in the footsteps of Butlerov have taken pains to preserve the 19th century interior, including beautiful glass bookshelves, redwood ornamentation, and antique desks and armchairs. The visitor can see authentic 19th century equipment, unique chemical samples and halls decorated with portraits of outstanding scholars.

[The Museum of the History of Kazan University](#), which opened in 1979, is located in the former University Chapel and is one of the most remarkable rooms of the main University building. A thousand exhibits familiarize the visitor with the history of Russia's second oldest university. It illustrates the scientific advances of KSU schools and presents its outstanding discoveries.

### *Sporting facilities*

Universities often provide high quality sports facilities for their students. These resources could be shared with the local region, by the development of partnerships with local sporting associations, to the benefit of both the university and the local community.

### **Universities and non-degree education**

#### *Continuing education*

Although sometimes portrayed as bastions of elitism, universities have a vital function of outreach into the surrounding community. Universities may run their own adult and continuing education programmes, or contribute to these in partnership with local authorities, offering the university resources

to non-degree courses. These are mutually beneficial: they provide the university with an additional source of revenue while offering a valuable service to the community.

#### *Long-distance learning*

Universities play a role in running educational courses in remote areas using E-learning methods. An example of this is the Barents Region (Archangel Region) in Northwest Russia.

### **Universities and regional culture**

#### *Regional languages*

Language is one of the most important aspects of regional culture. Universities have a role to play in preserving and fostering regional languages. They can contribute to this, not only by teaching the local languages, but also by collecting literature in the local language and building up repositories of cultural collections, such as musical scores and theatrical texts and making them available to local artists and performers.

#### *Crafts*

The university can assist in passing on knowledge of local skills and in documenting that knowledge. It can also contribute to the study of the history of such crafts.

#### *Case study: The Saami*

Some universities play an important role in promoting regional cultures which cross national boundaries. An example is the University of Tromsø, which is active, in cooperation with its Swedish, Russian and Finnish counterparts, in promoting Saami culture. The Centre for Saami studies in Tromsø museum, which includes a section on Sámi Ethnography, was incorporated into the university in 1976.

The Saami University College was established in Guovdageaidnu in 1989 as a result of Saami Movement's campaign. The college is based on the needs of Saami society for higher education and research.

The main elements of Saami University College scientific basis are: language and language development, sustainable development and biodiversity, and Saami teaching and understanding.

The College has national responsibility for Saami teacher-training and journalist-training and higher education. The College is funded by Norwegian Ministry of Education and it is the only one College among 38 University Colleges in Norway to maintain Saami culture. The College serves all Saami students in Saami Area of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia.

### **Universities and local arts**

Through their arts and humanities programs, universities provide education and training in a wide range of cultural subjects. There are a number of ways in which they can train people in the arts, support local arts and involve local artists.

#### *Cultural development councils*

Regional authorities need to budget and program their cultural activities. They usually have a specific committee for this purpose. University representation on such bodies could enhance cooperation and improve synergy between regional cultural operators.

#### *Partnerships*

Partnerships are increasingly important for cultural development, bringing together regional, national and private actors. Universities can lead the way in regional cooperation and provide logistical support for regional projects and funds. There is a clear need for integrated cultural policy planning for maximising resources. For effective cultural resource management there needs to be a comprehensive

mapping of cultural resources.

### **Inter-University networks**

Universities create their own regional networks, thereby fostering regional identity. This sometimes involves transborder cooperation and contributes to building up a strong relationship between border regions which share a common culture. It can include student exchanges and the issuing of common student cards.

#### *Case study: Saarland*

The University of the Saarland was founded by France in 1948, at the point where three countries – Germany, France and Luxembourg – meet. It is the only university in Germany to award French degrees.

In 1984, eleven universities in the Saarland-Lorraine-Luxembourg region signed the University Co-operation Charter, in which they committed themselves to working together and laid the foundation stone of cross-border university co-operation.

The establishment of the France Centre (Frankreichzentrum) at the University of the Saarland in 1996 provided a solid network for the development and cultivation of cross-border academic relations, which serves as focus and interdisciplinary platform for a wide range of francophone contacts. The project enjoys the Saarland Government's proactive support. One example is the supraregional summer university, which offers interdisciplinary lectures, seminars and language courses, focused on a different subject every year, at five university sites. This gives school-leavers, and particularly first-year students, a chance to get to know the various universities and their representatives in the greater region personally, and make many contacts.

Also noteworthy are the France Centre's seminars for job-seekers, which are open to all students and specifically prepare them for the French employment market.

The Franco-German University (Deutsch-Französische Hochschule – DFH) was founded in Saarbrücken. The 1997 Weimar State Treaty gives the DFH the task of strengthening and developing co-operation between Germany and France in the university and research fields. In particular, it is to:

- foster relations and exchange between universities in both countries,
- run Franco-German courses,
- promote long-term study periods at partner universities,
- enable students to take bi-national degrees or itself award degrees,
- encourage co-operative research and development ventures, and
- intensify joint further education measures.

The DFH has 133 partner universities in France and Germany, offering a total of 144 co-ordinated courses, with 4,000 students - and their number is increasing. As well as the bi-national courses, there are now seven tri-national courses.

## **13 Conclusion**

As institutions in charge of developing and enlarging the knowledge and competencies of citizens, universities are naturally and inevitably positioned as crucial social agents for the development of their surrounding environment in all areas of life. Cultural development is one of the basic preconditions for a fully functional society, and should therefore feature among the primary concerns in university strategic planning and management. Culturally determined values and attitudes influence the actions of individuals and groups in every area of social intercourse, from private to public, ethical, economic and political activity. Regional cultural identity encompasses some of the very basic notions in self-identification of communities, such as shared language, tradition and religion. Mobilization for well-informed social and political action, and positive motivation and actions affirming tolerance and cultural pluralism, all significantly raise the stability of a community, thereby increasing the general quality of life. It is therefore of the very essence of the role of universities to take an active part in regional cultural development.



The resources and basic instruments for this task are already available in the infrastructure of the majority of European universities. In some regions, the importance of this task is being realized and universities are already playing an important role in the cultural development of the surrounding region. The University of Kazan shows how a university can be the central force for the cultural development of the surrounding region. As seen in the example of the University of Tromsø and the Saami, such activities often concentrate primarily upon the rights of minorities, especially in terms of language policy. Another valuable model of action, as seen in the Saarland example, is regional networking, linking universities over international borders in joint programs and activities. These projects and initiatives constitute an important contribution to the cultural climate of their respective regions, but they do not exhaust the potential of universities for regional cultural development.

The challenge for regional authorities is to find new ways to harness the power of universities for the cultural benefit of all citizens.