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Alumni Networks – An untapped potential to attract and gain brain?

Interim Results of the BRAND Project
(Draft Paper)

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Abstract

Facing the outflow of highly skilled brains, regions, especially border regions, need to develop new strategies and instruments to retain and (re)attract highly skilled employees. For economies depending on innovation and knowledge generation a lack of highly skilled can endanger their social and economical development as well as their sustainability. In order to assure a positive brain flow and even to create brain circulation, as win-win-situation; border regions should seize the opportunity and foster cross-border learning and cross-border co-operation possibilities. The sub-project BRAND – Border Regions Alumni Network, as part of the INTERREG IV C Mini-Programme ‘Brain Flow’ addresses both issues. The project focuses on the possibility to take advantage of regional alumni networks with regard to the attraction of highly skilled workforce, which is indispensable for the development of smart, sustainable and inclusive places (Europe 2020 Strategy). Alumni networks as part of regional universities seem to be an untapped potential to attract once migrated highly skilled to their home regions and in this manner to increase regional brain gain by regularly maintain contact with former students (alumni). The paper ratio is to present interim results of an inventory of five border regions’ alumni networks in North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), Hedmark (Norway), Värmland (Sweden), Overijssel (Netherlands) and Basel (Switzerland). The outcomes are supposed to respond to the question: Can alumni networks contribute to the retention and (re)attraction of highly skilled workers and if yes, which conditions must be given to do so?

1 Introduction

Brain flow is a natural phenomenon and can be seen as part of labour mobility, describes the mobility of highly skilled workers and professionals which were recognized as *knowledge carrier* (cf. Romer 1990) or *gatekeepers of knowledge* (cf. Morrison 2008) and as being of particular importance for regions (cf. Florida 2008). By moving, mobile highly skilled workers contribute to inter-regional knowledge spillover effects and impact on regional economic success – a process, which will be described in this paper. Trippi/Maier 2007 too, emphasize the interlinkage be-

tween human capital, knowledge spillovers and regional economic growth. In this vein, Saxenian (2002, 2006) stresses the importance of highly skilled returnees, also known as return migrants, for regional economies and growth: when returning, once outmigrated highly skilled workers with abroad experience can become an economic driving force for their home regions. By combining their new with their former experiences and the knowledge of the home region, advantages arise affecting new business ideas and regional innovation. Thus, brain flow, such as described in the past lines, is a positive phenomenon to regions. But in case imbalance i.e. outflow and no new inflow or return of highly skilled workforce on the other hand, regions run the risk to loose competencies. A lack of highly qualified hits all regions, but especially applies to less attractive regions. Hence, metropolitan regions, attract highly skilled workforce when they search new job possibilities and make an informed location choice (cf. Florida 2008). Regions, primarily fighting for brains seem to be border and among these peripheral regions - as later examples of the BRAND project will present. For those less attractive regions, (re)attraction of highly qualified may be a major challenge, notably in light of the general global trend of metropolization (cf. Saunders 2011). In recent years, (re)attraction of qualified workforce was on the agenda of regional authorities on several levels. And also in scientific literature several (re)attraction concepts were discussed. As a result, for a while each region facing (re)attraction problems, put in the spotlight the rise of regional quality of life. New regional images including outlandish architecture were designed and communicated to the outside world as (re)attraction strategies. Alongside, authors as Florida (2008) or Storper/Scott (2009) discussed regional conditions and cultures, being suitable to high professionals' requests and attraction amenities, which possibly simplify the location choice. This paper follows a further approach and considers networks as a (re)attraction instrument for qualified workforce. In contrast to the original concept, which is known in the migration research as *migration networks* (Pries 2001) this text concentrates on regional *alumni networks*, and does not regard personal networks such as family, neighbours or friends. Capturing the migration network approach this paper transports its main issues to the (re)attraction discussion and investigates the following questions:

(1) Can already existing and established formal regional networks such as alumni networks, which still keep in touch with once outflowed alumni, be reoriented and used by broadening their scope of activities to function as regional promoters and (re)attractors of highly skilled humans?

To give possible answers this concept paper presents interim results of the BRAND - *Border Regions Alumni Network Development* Project, as part of the INTERREG IVC Mini Programme 'Brain Flow' in the following structure: Firstly, we step into the topic of the emerging importance of highly skilled workers as knowledge carrier for all types of regions. Secondly, we discuss on the example of five European border regions their demands of skilled workers and compare them to each other. With regard to retention and (re)attraction of highly qualified we firstly present the

migration network approach and then present the interim results of the BRAND alumni network analysis from five border regions. Last but not least we give a answer to the initial questions and an outlook to further steps of the project.

2 The interplay of highly skilled, knowledge spillover and regional development

Human capital is one key feature of regional economic growth and a driving force of innovation (cf. Tripl, Maier 2007). Thus, a strong pool of highly skilled humans is a competitive advantage in times of globalization. Heßler (2008) regards the performance of highly skilled workers on regions in the context of economic change by the decline of industrial societies and the increase of new knowledge-based economies. Growe (2009) describes the influence of highly skilled on economic production modes of post-industrial societies. This leads to the question: What is the interplay between human capital and regional development? As already mentioned in the introduction, the debate on human capital strongly focuses on highly skilled workers, supposed to be the key knowledge carrier. These well-educated humans have special knowledge and skills required in high-technology and knowledge-based sectors (Tripl, Maier 2007). Hence, the success of regional economy does not only depend on the quantity, but also on the quality of human capital which is '(...) available in the form of talented and aspiring workers' (cf. Champion 2011). Florida states 'When people – especially talented and creative ones – come together, ideas flow more freely, and as a result individual and aggregate talents increase exponentially' (cf. Florida 2008, p. 66). Referring to Morrison (2008) these talents contribute to regional innovation ability through (1) knowledge identification/exploration and knowledge translation to other regional multipliers (2) knowledge examination and (3) knowledge exploitation. Knowledge identification/exploration as well as knowledge examination are crucial for regional innovation and growth, but a further essential precondition for regional development is external knowledge (cf. Malmberg/Power 2005, Butzin 2000). Martin and Sunley (2006) state that missing transfer and the absorption of external knowledge can turn regional advantages into hazards, which often ends in regional inflexibility. Regional branches and clusters rely on a variety of knowledge to innovate constantly and therefore require external stimuli. External knowledge reaches regions through several channels, both at the individual and collective level. In their paper Tripl and Maier (2007) list several possibilities of knowledge spillover channels: These are scientific literature, informal and formal contacts, ideas exchanging, networking and cooperations with outside parties and spin-offs. A further channel of knowledge spillover is the highly skilled workforce inter-regional mobility. Faggian and McCann (2009) regard human capital migration as a recognized means of knowledge to be transferred between regions. Summarizing, it can be stated that especially well-educated human capital contributes to regional development and economy, a fact which cannot be denied, yet. Consequently, interregional brain flows, as possible spillover channels, have become center stage of several academic reflections in current years. However, in the context of regional innovation studies, very little is known

about the ways of knowledge flows and probably it is not possible to identify exact mechanisms of knowledge spillovers (cf. Faggian/MacCann 2009). Trippi and Maier (2007) mention that highly qualified knowledge flows are not one way flows but multi-directional and they therefore appeal for a approach going beyond the currently discussed 'brain drain' and 'brain gain' concepts. Thus, in this paper we understand brain flow, as an ongoing circulation of highly skilled workers between their home and host regions. Following this, in the next paragraph we will have a closer look at (re)attraction possibilities of talented humans and will give an inside in the concept of networks as one possible retention and (re)attraction instrument.

3 (Re)attracting brains by regional Alumni Networks

BRAND analysed five border regions Hedmark (NO), Värmland (SE), North Rhine-Westphalia (DE), Overijssel (NL) and Basel (CH) aiming at increase knowledge about regional migration patterns and find possible motives for the demand and outflow of highly skilled workers. In addition to overall regional facts such as number of inhabitants, size, infrastructure, BRAND also studied regional education systems including regional universities and their interplay with regional economy. The following comparison allows a first insight into the analysed border regions as part of the BRAND Phase 1 'Migration Patterns'.



Hedmark suffers from a lack of skilled workers in the sector child and health care. According to a survey performed by the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Service in 2011 around 20 percent of the companies in Hedmark report recruitment problems related to attracting skilled labor. Hedmark has a positive employment rate, in some municipalities less than 2 percent of the labour force is out of work. In comparison, Värmland currently suffers from a high unemployment rate, which 2009 was 9,4% and seems to be a result of the global European crises – but the current prognoses show a positive trend for future development. Especially the package and car industry, were hit by the crises. Both regions Hedmark and Värmland are not metropolitan regions, but rural and peripheral. Notably in Hedmark the distance between the main cities is larger than in other analysed BRAND regions such as i.e. NRW, which is characterized by agglomerations. When describing the regional economic structure Hedmark, traditionally is known as the big forest area in Norway, but also benefits from its close distance to the capital region Oslo. Besides forestry,

Hedmark's leading sectors are public sector services (38% of employees) and private sector services (26% of employees). But also tourism, creative class, agriculture, building and contraction sectors are allocated in the region. Värmland, bordering Hedmark, is known of its rural forest areas and is located exactly in-between the three cities Stockholm, Oslo and Gothenburg; which gives opportunities for people to commute to the bigger cities. As further sectors in the area steel, engineering, IT and paper industry can be named. Both, Värmland and Hedmark possess a SME driven company structure (85%) and among these several companies are just 1 person companies. Due to its good location, in the last few years, Värmland's attraction to foreign investments increased. Thus, the region seems to develop strongly and opens to new external business ideas. Concerning the higher education, Värmland shows some difficulties. Particularly, in the rural areas it can be noticed that the educational level of young men is below the national average which could be unused potential. Also Hedmark's tertiary education may be developed further in the long term. Both regional universities are not well known internationally so far, but awareness is rising and the number of international students is stable and is lightly increasing. In 2010 at the Hedmark University College there were 1151 new registered students among them 180 registered students from abroad. In comparison, the Karlstad University had 12.500 enrolled students in total. At this point, one should regard the size difference of both universities and also the offered number of faculties, which both is higher in Värmland. Thus, having a look at the number of degrees at both universities, in Hedmark 719 students graduated in 2010 in comparison Värmland shows a higher number of 1671. Both regions have difficulties to attract highly skilled workforce and foreign students and to reattract once outmigrated to metropolitan Norwegian and Swedish areas back to the home regions.

Compared to Värmland (22.551 km² and 273.265 inhabitants in 2010) and Hedmark (27.398 km² and 194.113 inhabitants in 2009), the region North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) contains of 34.088,01 km² and 17.838 million inhabitants. Due to the differences between the compared regions, the project team decided to focus on three sub-regions within the region NRW. Thus, the accomplished survey referred to the sub-regions Niederrhein (Lower Rhine Area), the Münsterland (administrative district Münster including the city Münster) and the Ruhrgebiet (Ruhr Area), with a focus on the city Bochum, as the location of the Ruhr-University Bochum. Even if all those regions are part of NRW, their requests for highly skilled workers shows different facets. The region Münsterland seeks for engineers, but seems to have an overplus of students in humanities, which after the study search a job in Münster and often staying, work under their qualification degree, which can mean a brain waste. The unemployment rate in Münster (302,96 km²) was 5,9% in 2010, just 0,8 % less in comparison to the whole Münsterland area (6.909,16 km²), having an unemployment rate of 6,7% in 2010. And even if it seems that in the Münsterland area there are further job possibilities a location change from the city Münster to the Münsterland is not on many highly skilled workers agenda. Therefore, Münsterland suffers

of a lack of highly qualified. In comparison to its capital city Münster, the Münsterland is a rural area in the surroundings, having a rural image. The city Münster itself attracts several highly skilled, already as students, by its popular university, its culture, historical roots, a good known club scene and its image as the known bicycle city in Germany. Annually, approx. 40.000 students graduate at the university in Münster. The difference between the city Münster and the Münsterland is obvious: while Münsterland is rural and attracts even more families, the city Münster is an attractive place for graduates and people who are attracted by a municipal quality of life, historical city flair and the everlasting university culture. In comparison to that, it is obvious that Münsterland is less attractive, even if this area offers many job opportunities in the service sectors, agriculture, industry, biotechnology and health sector, which often are overlooked by highly skilled workers. Especially a lack of doctors is already visible in the surroundings. A positive aspect of Münsterland is its close distance to the German cities Osnabrück, to the cities in the Ruhr Area and to Enschede (65km far away) in the Netherlands, so it is a good initial point for commuters. Even if the high number of students and graduates in the city Münster brings some advantages to the Münsterland region in form of highly qualified –the number of people attracted by the Münsterland could be higher. Thus, the highly skilled, which graduated in Münster follow the overall migration trend; they don't stay in the Münsterland area after their graduation, but rather in the city Münster itself or move to further metropolitan areas. A similar problem attracting highly skilled is known in the Niederrhein Area (Lower Rhine Area), which is located between metropolitan areas such as Düsseldorf and Cologne. A fact which seems to be positive at the first glance brings the challenge for the area to attract people to stay, while many leave after their graduation to the named metropolis. Graduates prefer the move to the suburbs of Düsseldorf and Cologne (which show a similar destination to the inner city than some cities located in the Lower Rhine Area), before staying in cities such as Mönchengladbach/Lower Rhine Area. A further difficulty may be the information mismatch between the regional universities and the local economy. An accomplished survey at the Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences in 2011 shows that graduates are hardly informed about job offers within the region and the economic landscape. The consequence is, especially for the regional textile industry: the graduates leave the region after the study of textile and clothing management, seeking a job somewhere else. The Ruhr Area and the analyzed city Bochum belong to an agglomeration within the federal state NRW, traditionally popular as a coal mine and steel region, being restructured during the last decades. The restructuring not only referred to the development of new economic sectors, it also concerned the creation of a new image of the Ruhr Area. Especially cities such as Bochum try to manage an unique characteristic image and differ from their surroundings. Regarding Bochum, it is today known for its renowned Ruhr-University Bochum, which is one of the ten biggest universities in Germany and offers about 70 fields of study. Asking for the need for highly skilled workers within Bochum and the Ruhr Area (Ruhrgebiet), currently there is no evident lack and the forecasts are difficult with regard to the future problem

development and the affected economic sectors. The Ruhr Area (4.435 km²) is one of the biggest city agglomerations in Europe with 11 independent cities and 6 administrative districts. Traditionally it is characterized by its roots in the coal mine work culture, which mainly is bound to openness and strong regional ties. Bochum as the rest of the Ruhr Area is a melting pot of many different people coming from all over the world. The international migration started in the 1950ies, when Polish and Turkish workforce was required to close the gap in Germany. Today the unemployment rate is relatively high with 11,4 %. The outside image of Bochum and the Ruhr Area still is close related to the old industries, but people who once migrate to the area often stay. The area itself had a long time problems with its image, it felt underestimated with regard to further German regions. Last but not least the image got improved by being capital of culture in 2010. Today the area is a mix of innovative influences and traditional roots passing workforce in services (53,5%); trade, catering industry and traffic (21,4%); industry (25,0%) and agriculture/forestry (00,1%). One can say that if there is a lack of skilled people within the region, it has negative effects on SMEs rather than on bigger international companies. By now, the results of several surveys accomplished with SMEs in NRW show single bottlenecks in engineering sectors such as electro and machine construction as well as industrial engineering. However, also skilled workers (in the sense of 'Fachkräfte') such as welders or metal workers etc. are needed. All in all, first negative impacts on the economy caused by a lack of highly or skilled workers are not acute and are not expected before 2013. But there are several hints showing that in future times the situation will change and that already now strategies for (re)attraction of skilled and highly skilled workers should be developed. Regarding Overijssel (3.420,86 km² and 1.134,434 inhabitants) and especially its sub-region Twente it seems to be a mixed region of rural and urban landscape. The region of Twente has a stronger (inter)national image than the province itself, supported by the presence of an internationally active university and football club that both carry the name of the region. The region attracts people who want both; working life and leisure attraction. The region attracts mostly families - people who are at the age of 35 and are ready to settle down. Overijssel, and also Twente deal with the problem to be less attractive to career starters, which at the same time seem to be the biggest brain drain problem of the region, having 5,3 % unemployment rate on the other hand. Career starters leave the region after a graduation at one of the 6 regional universities and mainly start a career somewhere else, even if returning some years later. Part of the explanation of the early emigration of students from the region could be a specific form of company structure that is popular in Overijssel - is that of Director Major Shareholder (Dutch: Directeur Grootaandeelhouder). The owner of the company is also the director and thus has a high involvement with the welfare of his staff. Typically these companies are SMEs and many graduates prefer global players at the start of their career and hope to find there international connections and a broader range of activities. There are just few multinational companies that place a head office in Overijssel, but several important one do by now establish an office mainly in the sectors industry, construction and agriculture, commercial

and non-commercial services. On contrary, the Basel region and especially the Canton Basel City (37,1 km² and 184.950 inhabitants) is an example of a border region which differs extremely from the others. While many of the BRAND regions suffer from emigration, Basel (mainly Basel city) shows a huge net migration, especially from Germany and a unemployment rate of 3,5% (2010) in the Basel County and 4% (2010) in the Basel city itself. Students come to Basel to study at the Basel University which has a very high and international reputation. Anyway, still approx. 70% of the students today are locals, while approx. 25% come from abroad, among them the most from Germany. The regional attraction of the metropolitan region having many cultural events is high. Basel is also attractive to many highly skilled workers, especially with regard to biotech, pharmatech, life science, and the bank/insurance sector and is known for its good business culture. The Basel city can be seen as a knowledge and science region, due to the research institutes and headquarters of known international companies, which in addition foster the positive regional image. Nevertheless, also Basel faces challenges with regard to the brain flow phenomenon. One of them is the increasing demand for housing; a further is the low attraction of the social environment (feeling of being welcome), which arises from the difficult integration of foreigners basing on difficult social rules, language barriers and at least xenophobia.

Even if all studied regions within BRAND are border regions, the comparison shows less commonality. Concerning brain flow, the BRAND border region comparison presents two important aspects: Firstly, if there is a regional lack of highly skilled workers, each region has an individual demand, which cannot and should not be generalised. Moreover, a general trend shows that a lack of highly qualified seems not only to differ regionally, but also sectorally. Main sectors searching for talents are MINT-based, engineering sectors or health related industries. Currently, NRW does not show a special demand for highly qualified, even if some sub-regions such as the Lower Rhine report a higher outflow of graduates and a mismatch between the regional universities and the local economies. According to a survey of the University of Applied Science Lower Rhine (2011) interviewed graduates stated their interest and preference to stay in the region, but assuming not to find a suitable job, they leave. On the contrary, regions such as Basel even show a positive net migration and less outflow of highly qualified. But Basel rather fights further problems, which is the decreasing regional level of local graduates. Secondly - as the above-mentioned international migration trends show, highly skilled workers often prefer a focus on agglomerations and metropolitan areas. But as knowledge is needed for regions to stay competitive in the globalised world (cf. Champion 2011, Coenen/Fickers 2010, Hassink 2010) – this raises new challenges to border regions, and especially to peripheral border regions such as Värmland and Hedmark to (a) attract external highly skilled, which never been to the region before and (b) to (re)attract once outmigrated locals, the so-called ‘expatriats’. Regarding the complexity of highly skilled workers mobility and its push-pull factors (cf. Lee 1966) regions need the right instruments for (re)attraction of highly skilled. In addition, regions such as Overijssel seek young

professionals, but seem to attract job returners in the middle-age. Hence, the difficulty is that there are no general measurement for highly skilled retention and (re)attraction. But rather each region should develop own activities tailored to its current situation. The location choices differ, as do places and people. Location-choosing can influence almost the whole life, therefore it becomes obvious why several highly skilled graduates and professionals search job opportunities in metropolitan areas at the beginning of their career and many middle-aged people return and like to settle down with their families in surroundings offering them acceptable housing prices and good child care possibilities. Thus the difficulty about attraction and the right measurements is, that the place has to fit to peoples' requirements, and life cycles. In literature lists of attracting highly qualified amenities are published among them quality of life, tolerant and creative environment, climate, wages, job opportunities (cf. Florida 2008, Storper/Scott 2009, Glaeser/Tobio 2007). BRAND focuses on a further aspect and stresses of personal relationships between regions and humans. Using alumni networks as a form of relationship marketing instruments to retain and (re)attract highly skilled workers BRAND contributes to the broad debate in current literature on that topic. In contrast to the known attraction concepts BRAND transfers the idea of interpersonal migration networks, which play a crucial role in humans mobility, to already existing alumni networks.

In general, migration networks are described as informal networks, mainly consisting of family members or close connected persons from same origin region, once outmigrated and spread in several host regions, but still keeping in touch over distance. Migration networks are extraordinarily important in manifold manner: (a) as decision maker, influencing outmigrants location choice, (b) as door opener in the arrival region, helping migrants simplifying the entrance to the local society and labour markets and (c) as the strongest connection between the home and host region, helping migrants to return, if needed. Moreover, migration networks are described as on trust based exchange platforms of economic, symbolic, social and cultural capital generating and transferring knowledge (Bourdieu 1983) between humans of the home and the host regions. This concept taken as example of international migration processes served to develop the BRAND project idea. In addition, as already mentioned in this paper it seems that highly skilled, who lived for a while or were born in a specific region are more likely to return to this, in comparison to those who never were where in the region before. Therefore, BRAND concentrates on already given regional alumni networks for two reasons: (1) alumni network, as part of regional universities, are directly in touch with highly skilled university graduates, (2) and they are contact points for international students, who after a period of time try to get in touch with their study region and university. Therefore, in BRAND alumni networks are meant to be instrumentalize for the following undertaking: (a) to promote the region within and outside regional borders to once migrated (alumni) to keep them informed about regional job possibilities, labour markets, quality of life (b) to (re)attract highly skilled alumni and high professionals to the home region, (c) and even interlink their knowledge in the region for local usage.

4 BRAND Project Interim Results - Alumni Network Analysis

To work out BRAND's idea, in the second project phase, an inventory of 11 alumni networks in five border regions were made. In a questionnaire alumni network managers firstly were asked general questions regarding the alumni networks' year of foundation, their initiators, number of members enrolled and their structure. Later on topics with regard to alumni network membership structure, finances in terms of funding, fundraising, sponsoring or members fees, as well as organizational structure including full-time equivalences were highlighted, to get information about the networks' organization degree. In the last section of the questionnaire the alumni network managers reported on the networks' scope of activities, and to whom the activities concern. Further questions regarded the information and communication activities of alumni networks and the communicated contents referring to regional news, events, economy structure, companies and job offers, as (re)attraction activities, were asked. Furthermore, the questionnaire aimed at findings about already existing binding instruments addressing students.

In the following, a first summary of interim results will be presented. (1) Firstly, in diagram 1 an overview of the organization degree will be given. The organization degree is composed of alumni network management structure, number of employees, full-time equivalence, financial issues, marketing and communication strategy, professional corporate design and evaluation. (2) In the second diagram the scope range of activities of the alumni networks concerning retention and (re)attraction of highly skilled workforce is regarded.

The acronyms stand for:

MÜ(fa).AN – Faculty Alumni Network in Münster (NRW)

OV(fa).AN – Faculty Alumni Network in Twente (Overijssel)

OV(UAS1).AN – First example of a University of Applied Sciences Alumni Network in Twente (Overijssel)

OV(UAS2).AN – Second example of a University of Applied Sciences Alumni Network in Twente (Overijssel)

LR(UAS).AN – University of Applied Sciences Alumni Network in Lower Rhine (NRW)

BA(U).AN – University Alumni Network in Basel (Basel Region)

BO(U).AN - University Alumni Network in Bochum (NRW)

OV(U).AN - University Alumni Network in Twente/Enschede (Overijssel)

VÄ(U).AN - University Alumni Network in Karlstad (Värmland)

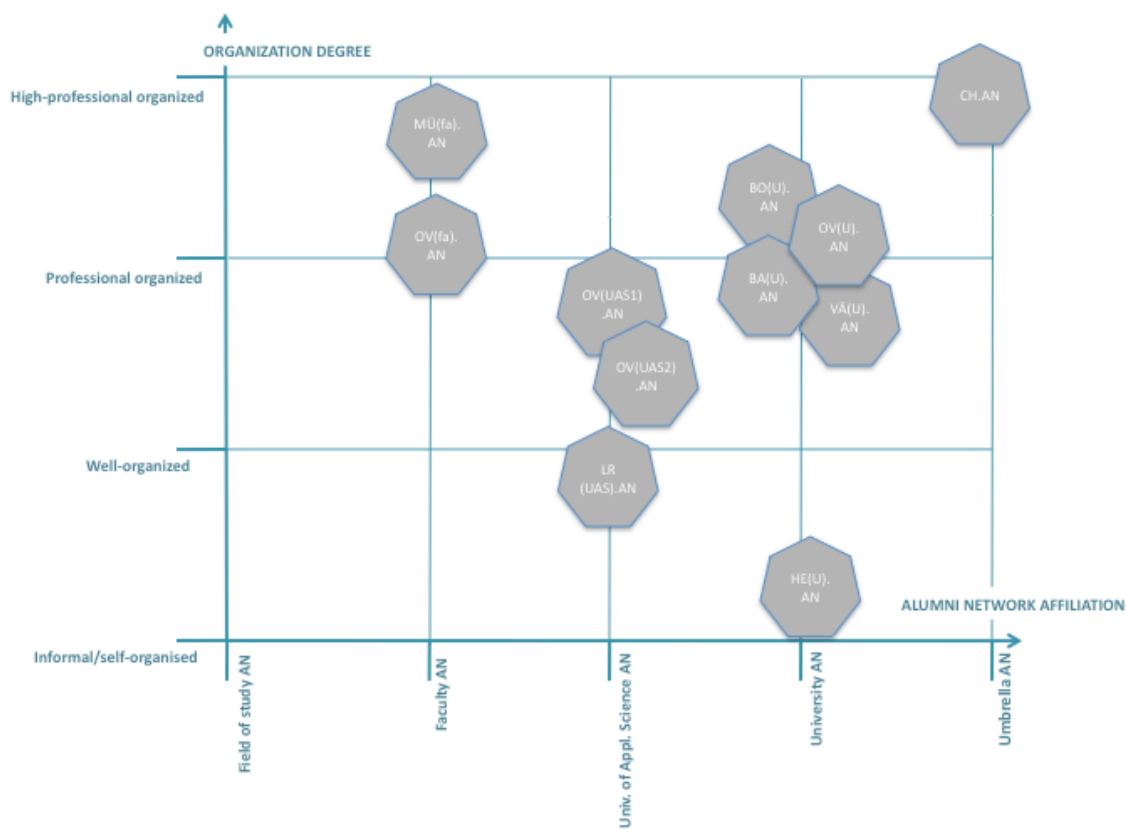


Diagram 1: Alumni network organization degree

Diagram 1 shows that a high level of professionalization is hardly reached among the 11 analysed alumni networks. Generally spoken, regarding most alumni networks management structure, the number of employees and their full-time equivalence is low - most alumni networks are run by one alumni manager in half-time occupation. Just a few alumni have an official board – which depends on the official structure and the initiators, which started the network. The BRAND examples show a wide range of staff deployment. On the one hand the HE(U).AN example presents an alumni network run by a professor as sideline, keeping informally in touch with former students, especially from abroad. On the other hand the example of the umbrella organisation CH.AN, which is the overall organization of all swiss universities of applied sciences, presents an occupation of 17 employees, among them 10 in full-time occupation - a high standard, but a exception in the BRAND project. With regard to financial issues the main alumni networks are part of a university and belong to rector's office, also in means of funds. Only three networks, among them MÜ(fa).AN additionally work with a member fee model. In the case of MÜ(fa).AN member fees present a relatively small proportion of the alumni network's funds and are supplemented by further income possibilities such as an annual graduates book, offered to regional and interregional companies to simplify their searching for highly skilled employees. BA(U).AN is a further example financed partly by alumni fees, which obtain special benefits through their extra payment – among others a free journal subscription. Additionally, the umbrella organization CH.AN, which is the only high-professionalized network in BRAND finance

itself via project acquisition and sponsoring. Considering the networks' marketing and communication strategy, which should include a professional corporate design, most in BRAND analysed alumni networks possess a solid brand recognition through a logo, templates, colour scheme and a mission statement, communicating the networks' strategies and main ideas to the outside world, as the example of the BO(U).AN demonstrates. A professional webpage including special visual design and online offers seems to be a common instrument used by BO(U).AN and CH.AN and MÜ(fa).AN, BA(U)AN, VÄ(U).AN. In addition, most alumni networks dispose of a professional database to manage their members' data. Beside the webpages, usually alumni networks use newsletters and annual journals as communication and information platforms. With regard to success evaluation of alumni network activities, main networks, with the exception of MÜ(fa).AN and VÄ(U).AN, were not evaluated, yet. These described facts paint a picture which can be summarized in an overall organization degree of each alumni network. Subsuming, it can be stated, as already in the beginning of this section, that most BRAND alumni networks still need a professionalization. Among them are good examples, which dispose of professional structures, but just a low number of them is on the way to become high-professional. But, alumni network professionalization is extraordinarily important for alumni work and future development. Currently, the analysed networks request more manpower and full-time occupation as well as higher financial resources to become a spotlight of universities and also to be perceived as (re)attracting instruments.

Thus, alumni network organization degree is important. Regarding BRAND's concern – the retention and (re)attraction of highly skilled by alumni networks - the scope of alumni activities, which can be regarded as relationship marketing to target groups, will be focused next. Hence, the second diagram, presents the interim results of the alumni network activities analysis.

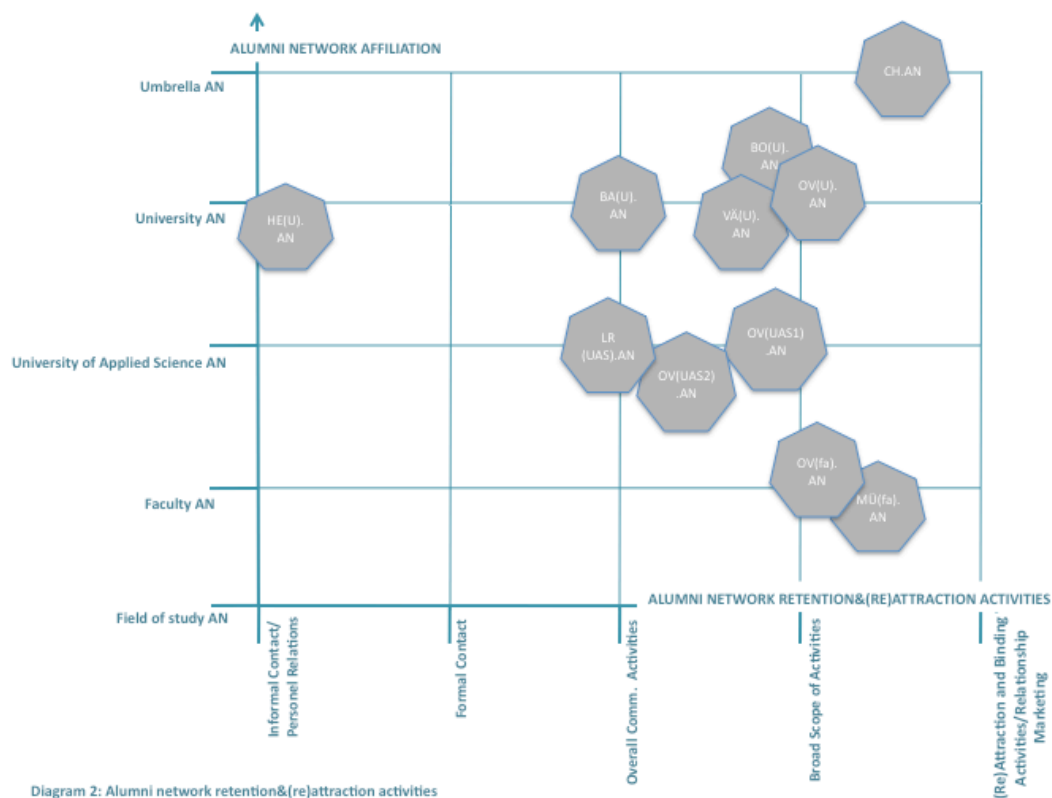


Diagram 2: Alumni network retention & (re)attraction activities

It can be noted that a low number of alumni networks adjust their activities at retention and (re)attraction of highly skilled. By retention and (re)attraction activities BRAND understands activities, which directly respond to highly qualified requirements in order to (1) bind them to the university and the region before their graduation and before they make a location choice (this should be already focused during the study). In this term, possible binding activities accomplished by alumni networks could be field trips and regional excursions, mentoring programs, internships, career fairs, summer schools for abroad students and (2) activities, aiming at spreading information about the home region, it's economy and job possibilities. Regarding this, in general the BRAND interim results indicate, that a higher alumni networks' organization degree also reveal a broad range of different activities - but at the same time does not assure any success. The HE(U).AN is a example of an informal, self-organized alumni network run by a professor on the side. In contrast to the other examples, it does not posses any activities and not even an webpage, but it guarentees a close relationship between the professor/the university and the former students by mails and phone calls. HE(U).AN shows that small, informal structures can cause good effects, as stated by the professor in the interview, which can be recognized by the alumni feedback, which is the visit and in some cases a return to the region. Here, the only used instrument is the close personnel relationship between the alumni and the professor. Back to the other examples, which in comparison to HE(U).AN are formal organized; they also differ in their activities. In the main, BRAND analysed alumni networks dispose of a high number of activities, which spread information. For this, the networks' webpage and social media is the key in-

strument. Alumni networks such as LR(UAS).AN, being at the beginning of their life cycle, do not even use social media or a webpage, but limit their information activities on print media or mailings. As many analysed networks are overall university organizations, addressing all kinds of alumni, most information activities must address a broad alumni range. A couple of faculty alumni networks concentrate on specific tailormade news, informing their specific target groups, as MÜ(fa).AN shows. Alumni networks with a broader scope of activities than information and communication, offer additional services to alumni such as journals subscriptions for free, alumni sports, favourable rates for insurance, cheaper public transport such as the OV(UAS2).AN demonstrates. With regard to student retention activities BO(U).AN offers a broader range such as guide tours around the campus, providing a personal link to the students and presenting them the university advantages, a career colloquium, a career fair as well as interships and mentoring programs. Regarding the networks' (re)attraction activities, the OV(U).AN is in close contact to students from abroad, especially from China and Indonesia, and cooperate with them in order to promote the university, using the contact to address further students for a study in the region. To offer (re)attraction activities such as information about regional economy and job possibilities BO(U).AN provides contacts to the university career center to keep alumni informed. The OV(UAS1) is an example of an alumni network, which offers a broad range of (re)attracting activities. In addition to the usual network activities, OV(UAS1) obtains training courses, job opportunities, traineeships, information about regional entrepreneurs and innovation activities to the alumni. A further network, the OV(fa).AN is in most parts focused on internationalization and even offers financial support to alumni in the host countries to assure a small start possibility for them in the outside world. The CH.AN provides on the contrary not only job possibilities, but even career guidance and advice to alumni as employees. Most of the alumni networks established home coming events and reunion parties as annual events. These can be used as (re)attraction instruments when organizing them not only in the sense of a party, but as personal care in the sense of a relationship marketing. The MÜ(fa).AN closely cooperates with the regional marketing office and regional companies, which sponsor the network's home coming events, as exchange and attracting instrument. Furthermore, through the graduates book, regional economy gets the possibility directly to contact graduates and attract them for a regional job before they decide to leave the region and search jobs somewhere else.

In general, our analysis shows that the BRAND alumni networks offer a broad range of information and communication activities and further services for alumni. Anyway they are limited in retention and (re)attraction offers. Asking alumni network manager for reasons, missing manpower and resources, less professionalization and internationalization are named. Aside this they added, that a stronger cooperation with further regional actors or regional economy or further university organizations such as e.g. career center, never were on their agenda. Summarizing, it can be stated that the BRAND topic to use alumni networks for retention and

(re)attraction activities is currently not a key activity of the analysed alumni networks. Anyway, asking alumni network manager, if overtaking such activities in future would be possible, main reactions are positive.

5 Conclusion

This paper presented the interim results of the BRAND *Border Region Alumni Network Development* project. In BRAND following question was investigated 1) Can already existing and established formal regional networks such as alumni networks, which still keep in touch with once outflowed alumni, be reoriented and used by broadening their scope of activities to function as regional promoters and (re)attractors of highly skilled humans?

To answer these questions this paper firstly, explained the importance of highly skilled workforce for regional economy and secondly presented on the examples of five analysed BRAND border regions the different demand of highly skilled workers in both terms: regionally and sectorally and state that highly skilled workforce demand cannot be generalized. Furthermore, this paper pointed out, that especially peripheral regions face the challenge to retain and (re)attract talents, as their attraction degree is less comparing to metropolitan areas. Doing this, BRAND presented alumni networks as a further attraction instrument for regions. Analysing the BRAND alumni networks two things could be stated: (1) currently, the BRAND alumni networks are not high-professionalized and (2) their range of activities does not adjust retention and (re)attraction of highly skilled, yet. Thus, to answer the initial question, this paper still asserts that alumni networks, by keeping in touch with once outmigrated alumni, can act as regional promoters and (re)attractors by broadening their scope of activities, but firstly they need a higher degree of professionalization including better working conditions in means of higher full-time equivalences, financial support, professional outside communication and visual design. This can be reached, primarily by raising the acceptance of alumni network activities among the universities and the regions. Secondly, the interim results present that alumni networks' activities are narrow by now in terms of retention and (re)attraction of highly skilled alumni – and that in most cases alumni networks' activities just focus outside communication and inform alumni solely about university life, but hardly offer them information concerning the region itself, regional economy or job possibilities. As this paper is a summary of the interim BRAND results in the following project steps a guideline for alumni networks will be developed presenting possibilities to broaden alumni networks' activities in means of the BRAND main idea. Shortly, some recommendations can already be outlined:

- (1) Warm place marketing describes a concept which tries by special activities to create an emotional or socio-economic relationship between humans and a region. Originally, developed by Hospers (2010) the concept concentrates on (re)attraction of highly skilled workers, which were born in the region, studies, worked or lived there, assuming that

these target groups are easier to address with regard to return intentions than humans, who does not have any reference to a special region. Using the main idea of the project alumni networks could create activities with the aim to bind student to the region already during the study. Possible activities in line with the concept could be common regional visit studies for (a) students to have an insight to the regions' history, economy structure and culture. Moreover, to bind (b) students from outside the region/international students by 'summer schools'. Doing a summer schools common experiences can be made which contribute to positive impressions on the guests, and later can be used for (re)attraction. In addition, home coming events for (c) alumni/graduates could be broaden as exchange and information events to (re)attract talents from abroad bringing them in contact with regional companies etc.

- (2) To exploit alumni knowledge in the home region and use it for the university, alumni networks can develop special activities for scientists, which are former students of the home university. Keeping in touch and providing them special offers, such as exchange platforms or consulting, could once result positively on the home university and region.
- (3) To broaden network activities with further university and regional organizations. The term relationship marketing covers the idea of a close cooperation between alumni networks, career centers, fundraising and press offices as well as further university organizations which aim at addressing students and alumni to rise universities' perception within and outside regional borders. In a second step, these networking activities can be broaden by further interlinkage between regional authorities such as companies and marketing agencies. Doing so, universities and regions can work hand in hand and develop common concepts to bind and (re)attract highly skilled workers.

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