BRAND.

Border Region Alumni Network Development

Using Alumni Networks

for Regions

IAT
Institut Arbeit und Technik

brain Flow

INTERREG IVC
INNOVATION & ENVIRONMENT
REGIONS OF EUROPE SHARING SOLUTIONS

European Union
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In the last decade one can find a rising awareness towards human capital as key factor facing the challenges of the knowledge society. Knowledge only has positive effects: when people know how to assess it, how to make good use of it and how to proceed from the academic know-why to the practical know-how. Paradoxically, at the same time, companies and regions face rising skills shortage in human capital emphasised by reasons such as: demographic change, shrinking inhabitants as well a value change shifting educational professional interest from engineering to fields like services and creativity. Peripheral regions are the first to suffer from these trends and to run the risk of human capital becoming a bottleneck on the way to growth and wealth. These last aspects are supposed to lead to competitive disadvantages in attracting high-qualified people. Florida's creative class and creative cities still dominate the thinking of academics as well as authorities of regional economic development and marketing managers.

Nonetheless, there are good reasons to assume that things are not as simple as they seem. After decades of European integration – not least driven by INTERREG activities – former (national) border regions and peripheries overcame national borders and built up cross-regional links. Border and peripheral regions are often ‚early birds' in ecological transition and especially the networks between people in peripheral and less dense regions are stronger and more vital than in dense agglomerations. These networks can be understood as social capital that can be used to interact with players from outside the region and to (re)-attract them. In terms of knowledge society those networks can be studied as pipelines of knowledge (re)-flows or the tracks of brain flow. Brain flow is much more than competition for most skilled workers, it is about leaving for learning and coming back for making good use of the lessons learnt abroad. And it is about anchoring regions as strong nodes in global knowledge flows. This anchoring needs high-skilled people, and an inspiring and attractive milieu to live and work in. The INTERREG IVC Mini-Programme ‚Brain Flow' in general and its sub-project BRAND with a focus on alumni networks is about this before mentioned anchoring in global knowledge flows: about the high-skilled workers who are requested to work as an innovative and sustainable node and about the environment where people can make the best of their potential.

‚Brain Flow' – Brain Flow and Knowledge Transfer Fostering Innovation in Border Regions

is an INTERREG IVC Mini-Programme co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

What is ‚Brain Flow'?

The Mini-Programme ‚Brain Flow' helps regions of Europe work together to share experiences and good practices in the INTERREG IVC priority of the knowledge economy. The ‚Brain Flow' partnership represents 8 border regions from 7 different countries being affected by this phenomenon due to their specific socio-economic and geographical characteristics. As a lack of qualified labour force is also a barrier to the innovation and growth capacity of regions, the partnership is looking for new ways, instruments and measures to tackle the problem. During this cooperation, partner regions will exchange in order to develop and introduce new or improved instruments to minimise brain-drain and simultaneously foster brain-gain and optimally reach brain-circulation. Within ‚Brain Flow', an intense inter-regional exchange takes place on two complementary levels: (a) the overall (strategic) Mini-Programme level and (b) the individual (practical) sub-project level. Within ‚Brain Flow' 8 sub-projects among them BRAND were approved.

Main Objectives

The overall aim of ‚Brain Flow' is to enable regional authorities and other regional/local actors to develop and improve their policies and instruments to counter the outflow of highly educated and qualified people (brain-drain) and to retain and (re)-attract human capital (brain-gain) in their regions in support of their innovation capacity and competitiveness.

The Mini-Programme Aims at

➤ Enhancing exchange of experience and good practices as well as knowledge transfer of existing policies, strategies and instruments in order to foster brain-gain

➤ Developing new policies, strategies and instruments to establish/gain a common knowledge base

➤ Disseminating this information to border regions, cross-border regions and other actors involved in cross-border cooperation

➤ Implementing outcomes within participating regions in order to initiate a modernised regional policy

‚Brain Flow' Three Priorities

Each sub-project concentrates on one of the three priorities that reflect the main objectives of the Mini-Programme ‚Brain Flow':

1. Increasing regional attractiveness
2. Supporting key economic sectors
3. Improving the higher education system

Why Border Regions?

In the context of territorial cohesion border regions are places where barriers become most obvious. One significant challenge in this respect is the increasing loss of high-skilled human capital through the movement to more favourable economic environments, the so-called brain-drain phenomenon.

‚Brain Flow' Partners

➤ Province of Gelderland – The Netherlands
➤ Hedmark County Coulcil – Norway
➤ Region of Navarre – Spain
➤ Nemunas Euroregion Marijampole Bureau – Lithuania
➤ The Ministry of Economic Affairs, Energy and Industry of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia (MWEIMH) – Germany (Lead Partner)
➤ Province of Overijssel – The Netherlands
➤ Regio Basiliensis – Switzerland
➤ Värmland County Administrative Board – Sweden

BRAND – Border Region Alumni Network Development

is a sub-project of the INTERREG IVC Mini-Programme ‚Brain Flow' co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

What is BRAND?

Faced with intense regional competition for high-skilled workers border regions must develop capacities and strategies to attract and retain human capital in order to sustain their innovative and competitive power. In this regard, inter-regional migration can have a significant impact on the regional economy. (Re)-migration holds a high potential for unlocking these positive effects. In BRAND five ‚Brain Flow' border regions – North Rhine-Westphalia, Värmland, Hedmark, Regio Basiliensis, Overijssel – are engaged in the development of strategies and instruments to attract high-skilled workers by region.

Why Alumni Networks?

The sub-project's main emphasis is on regional alumni who keep contact to their home region by the use of alumni networks. One of the major reasons for (re)-migration lies in a warm place feeling towards the home regions. Spreading the right information to potential returners is therefore, seen as an important task of alumni networks.

In this context, alumni networks can function as knowledge hub providing not only the necessary information, but an image of the region. Alumni networks can work as exchange platforms for knowledge, information or regional images. They overtake the function of gatekeepers between the home region and the host region.

Main Objectives

- ➤ To gain insights into (return) migration
- ➤ To analyse alumni networks
- ➤ To transfer good practice to alumni networks
- ➤ To capture regional images
- ➤ To elaborate a joint action plan for alumni networks
- ➤ To connect inter-regional alumni networks

BRAND PHASES

PHASE 1 (May '11 – September '11) –
Migration Patterns & Motives
- collection and comparison of data in the border regions concerning migration
- literature review

PHASE 2 (October '11 – April '12) –
Analysing & Mapping Alumni Networks
- in-depth analysis of alumni networks
- identification and comparison of underlying network mechanisms

PHASE 3 (May '12 – April '13) –
Guideline, Joint Action & Business Plan
- tailored guidelines for regional alumni networks
- policy recommendations in promotion of alumni networks

Friends of BRAND

BRAND Partners
➤ Värmland County Administrative Board – Sweden/Värmland
➤ Hedmark County Council – Norway/Hedmark
➤ Hedmark University College – Norway/Hedmark
➤ Institute for Work and Technology, Westfälische Hochschule – Germany/North Rhine-Westphalia (Lead Partner)
➤ Institute NIERS, Hochschule Niederrhein – University of Applied Sciences – Germany/North Rhine-Westphalia
➤ Karlstad University – Sweden/Värmland
➤ REGIO BASILIENSIS – Switzerland/Regio Basiliensis
➤ University of Twente – The Netherlands/Overijssel

Brain Flow and the Importance of High-Skilled Workforce

Brain flow is a natural phenomenon. It describes the mobility of high-skilled workers and professionals. Due to several authors such as Faggian and Trippl these are recognised as agents and carriers of knowledge, who contribute in a manifold manner to the regional economy. By moving between regions high-skilled workers bring in new knowledge and foster inter-regional knowledge spillover effects. They expand regional human capital and form a social capital as regional added value through their (inter)-regional networking activities. Doing so high-skilled workers enlarge the regional knowledge base, create a competitive environment and maintain the regional innovation ability. Particularly, high-skilled returnees, as studies of authors such as Saxenian and Klagge present, are regarded as effectors of new business ideas and novelties. Their abroad acquired experience combined with local knowledge, increases the advantages for the regional development and seems to be a driving force for domestic economies.

Consequently, brain flow, as described in the past lines, holds a tremendous potential. However, in the case of an imbalance between the outflow and the inflow of high-skilled workforce, regions run the risk to lose competencies and face brain-drain. A lack of brains hits all regions depending on innovation, knowledge generation and quality production. Brain-drain especially affects to less attractive regions such as border and peripheral regions – as later examples of the BRAND sub-project will present. Border and peripheral regions are defined as places where barriers towards territorial integration and competitiveness become most obvious in comparison to capital regions, which more often profit from economic dynamics and innovation potentials. For those less attractive regions the retention and (re)-attraction of high-skilled workers may be a major challenge, notably in the light of the general global trend of metropolisation.

The sub-project BRAND – Border Regions Alumni Network Development – is dedicated to the development of capacity building instruments in border regions including the periphery with the overall goal of retaining and gaining high-skilled workers. To achieve this, inspired by the social network theory, BRAND focused on university alumni networks as regional tools to retain the professionals after their graduation and to make those who moved elsewhere return home. BRAND assumes that a high number of graduates is willing to stay in their domestic region, when finding an appropriate job. Thus, a lack of information concerning regional career opportunities, economic landscape and the options lying ahead of each graduate are often reasons for highly educated people to leave. Alumni networks may contribute by information spreading to the decision taken by high-skilled workers to stay in the region:

➤ as instruments for increasing regional attraction and
➤ as instruments for problem solving of regional skills shortage by fostering (re)-migration and knowledge (re)-circulation.

BRAND's Border Regions at a Glance

BRAND consists of five border regions - these are Hedmark (NO), Värmland (SE), North Rhine-Westphalia (DE), Overijssel (NL) and Basel (CH) — all have made their own experience with brain-drain. With the exception of Basel and parts of North Rhine-Westphalia, the named border regions are not agglomerative and consequently exhibit less regional attraction in comparison to metropolitan areas. Even if all these regions have their own educational institutes (universities/universities of applied sciences) they still face a brain-drain problem.

Hedmark (Size: 27 397 square kilometers, Population: 193 479 inhabitants, Unemployment Rate: 2 percent)

The Hedmark region is located in mid-east Norway on the border to Sweden. The unemployment rate is low and the level of working women is high. Trade and cooperation with Sweden is high, especially within the areas of forestry related industries and ICT. The region's specialisations are aluminium industry, livestock industry, wood, tourism and creative sector.

Lacks:
➤ There is a high need for high-skilled people. One of seven regional companies report having hired people with lower qualification than desired. According to a survey, performed by the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Service in 2011, around 20 percent of the companies in Hedmark report recruitment problems related to attracting skilled labour.
➤ The education level in Hedmark is low compared to other Norwegian regions and a high number of students quit their studies before graduating. The region has a mismatch between the university and the regional economy when it comes to the ICT-sector, the creative sector and the health sector; hence the region needs skilled workforce in these areas and the regional university does not meet up the supply with the demand.

Demands:
➤ To improve openness and attitude towards innovation and diversity
➤ To aquire high-skilled labour force, especially in the health sector
➤ To aquire high-skilled people for companies in the more rural areas of the region, as the trend goes towards centralisation to cities
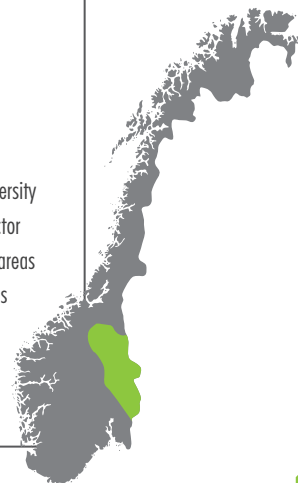
Värmland (Size: 17 586 square kilometers, Population: 273 000 inhabitants, Unemployment Rate: 9,5 percent)

Värmland is located in mid-west Sweden on the border to Norway (it is a cross-border region to Hedmark). The unemployment rate has increased during the past five years and especially among the young people (27,3 percent). This probably relates to the global economic crisis, which hit the Swedish industries hard. Värmland's regional specialities are steel, engineering, ICT and paper industry.

Lacks:

➤ The number of job alternatives that attracts a high-skilled workforce decreases.

➤ There is a mismatch between the university and the labour market. The demand for work is higher than the supply, thus the high-educated gradutes go elsewhere to find jobs - for example to the cross-border regions in Norway where the demand for high-skilled people is higher.

➤ Many inhabitants of Värmland choose to commute to Norway since the living costs on the Swedish border are less.

➤ Concerning the higher education there is a particular problem in the rural areas of the region, where it can be noticed that the educational level of young men is below the national average, which could be seen as unused potential.

Demands:

➤ To lower the current high unemployment rate

➤ To raise the interest for higher education of unemployed young men in the rural area

➤ To improve and develop the research focus at the university
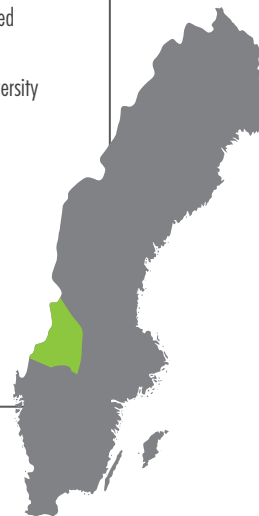
Overijssel (Size: 3 420 square kilometers, Population: 1.134,434 inhabitants, Unemployment Rate: 5,3 percent)

The region of Overijssel borders Germany in the east, thus it is a border region to North Rhine-Westphalia. Overijssel is part of the economic region ‚East Netherlands' whose knowledge policy focuses on three knowledge and economic sectors: Food Valley (Wageningen), Health Valley (Nijmegen) and Technology Valley (Twente). The in BRAND analysed part region of Twente has a stronger (inter)national image than the province itself, supported by having an internationally active university and football club, that both carry the name of the region.

Lacks:

➤ The education level in Twente is low compared to other regions because the economy used to be based on low skilled manufacturing.

➤ There is a mismatch between the need for high-skilled workforce given the regional ambition of being a high-tech, innovative region and the brain-drain and present level of education in the region.

➤ Although the region has its own research and applied science universities many students leave for the core regions in the west of the Netherlands. This is particularly the case for university graduates.

Demands:

➤ To build a strong link in the Twente region between innovation strategies and brain flow strategies

➤ To keep a larger part of the graduated in the region by building a knowledge based regional economy

➤ To interest more students for technical studies

North Rhine-Westphalia (Size: 34 084 square kilometers, Population: 18 million inhabitants, Unemployment Rate: 8,1 percent)

North Rhine-Westphalia is the largest region in the BRAND project and it is a border region both to the Netherlands and Belgium in the west. North Rhine-Westphalia has a strong, industrially based economy uniquely combined with important rural areas and natural habitats. In November 2010, the unemployment rate was the second highest among all western German regions. North Rhine-Westphalia strives to become Germany's number one innovation region by 2015. Due to the size of North Rhine-Westphalia it is difficult to draw conclusions for the whole region, as the brain-drain problem differs within the different sub-regions.

Lacks:
➤ In the whole North Rhine-Westphalia qualified staff, high profile researchers and engineers are lacking.
➤ Main sectors hit by skills shortage are the MINT-based sectors.
➤ There is a problem to attract high-skilled workers to the rural areas in the region as many people search for job opportunities in the metropolitan regions.
➤ A further difficulty may be the information mismatch between the regional universities and the local economy. For example the region Münsterland seeks for engineers, but seems to have an overplus of students in humanities, who after their studies search a job in the city of Münster and often staying, work under their qualification degree level, which can mean a brain-waste.
➤ 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 existing 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.

Demands:
➤ To improve the attractiveness for high-skilled workers to the rural areas
➤ To improve and develop regional information channels for current students at the universities about work possibilities that the sub-region might offer after graduation
➤ To increase the communication between the universities and regional authorities about the region's demand to avoid mismatch problems
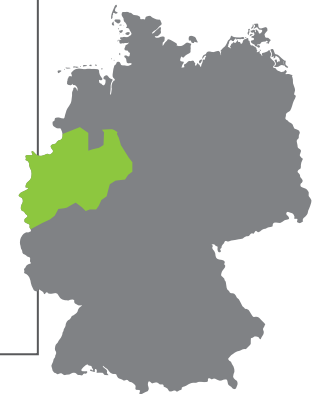
Basel Region (Size: 518 square kilometers, Population: 274 404 inhabitants, Unemployment Rate: 4 percent)

Basel region is an example of a border region which differs from the other BRAND partner regions. While many of the BRAND regions suffer from emigration, Basel (mainly Basel city) shows a huge net migration, foremost coming from Germany. 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.

Lacks:
➤ Also Basel faces challenges with regard to the brain flow phenomenon such as the increasing demand for housing, low attraction of the social environment (feeling of being welcome), which arises from the difficult integration of foreigners based on difficult social rules, language barriers and as well as xenophobia.

Demands:
➤ To increase demand for housing due to the high flow of qualified immigrants into the region - thus improved regional spatial planning is needed
➤ To improve the integration or even inclusion of immigrants to the region
➤ To better absorb qualified migrants' knowledge for regional and company concerns
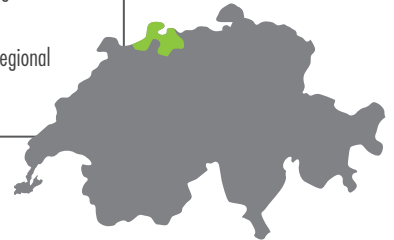
Summary of Finding: Concerning brain flow, the BRAND border region comparison reveals two important aspects: Firstly, if there is a regional lack of high- skilled workers, each region has an individual demand which cannot and should not be generalised. Secondly, a general trend shows that a lack of high-skilled workers seems not only to differ regionally, but also sectorally — therefore a differenciated look on the brain-drain phenomenon is needed.

Graduate Survey

To test BRAND's assumption that a high number of graduates is willing to stay in their domestic region, when finding an appropriate job, two studies were run in the region of North Rhine-Westphalia and its part region Lower Rhine – a rural sub-border region. All in all within both studies about 2227 students and graduates where asked concerning their motives of migration and their knowledge of regional company landscape (1769 graduates interviewed) as well as on regional and company workplace attraction factors (458 MINT-students interviewed).

Motives for Graduates' Migration:
- ➤ personal and family related reasons
- ➤ job offer from outside the region
- ➤ low regional attraction does not play a significant migration motive
- ➤ two-thirds of the outmigrated graduates would have stayed in case of a more attractive job offer
- ➤ there is a limited knowledge of the adequate corporate landscape
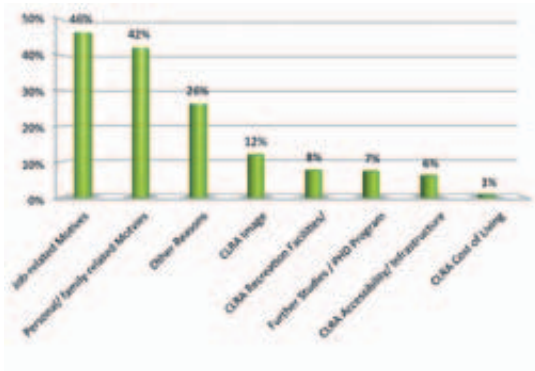
Fig. 1 Motives for Migration after Graduation
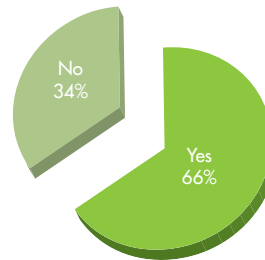Source: Hochschule Niederrhein, Graduate Survey 2012

Fig. 2 Would the Graduates Stayed in the Region in Case of a More Attractive
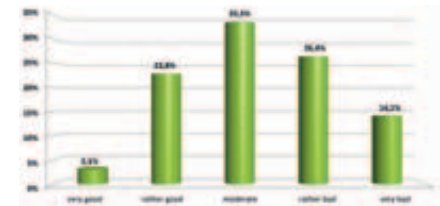Job-offer? Source: Hochschule Niederrhein, Graduate Survey 2012

Fig. 3 Knowledge of the Adequate Corporate Landscape
Source: Hochschule Niederrhein, Graduate Survey 2012

MINT-Study

(Maths - Informatics - Natural Sciences - Technology)

Overall Results:

➤ Students estimated the locations in which they lived during their study time as an attractive workplace after graduation

➤ The mobility behavior differs depending on the study focus and age, these statements refer to MINT- graduates

➤ An attractive workplace is the most important criterion for MINT-graduates

➤ Workplace-branding should therefore be part of each (re)-attraction strategy of high potentials

➤ Workplaces are searched preferentially in the region of one's birth or study place

➤ Quality of life is the highest attraction factor

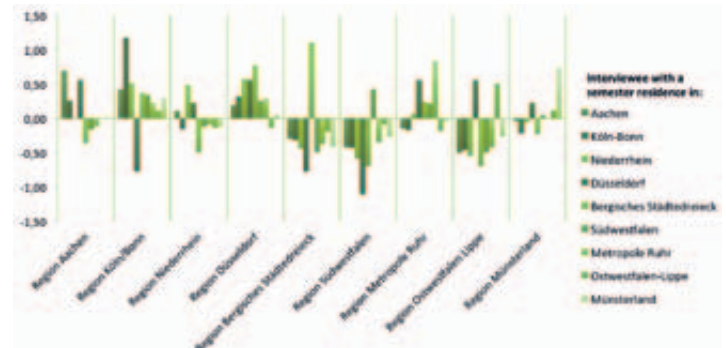➤ The most attractive job is the one which combines interesting tasks and being save

Fig. 5 Attraction of the Economic Region Depending on the Semester Residence
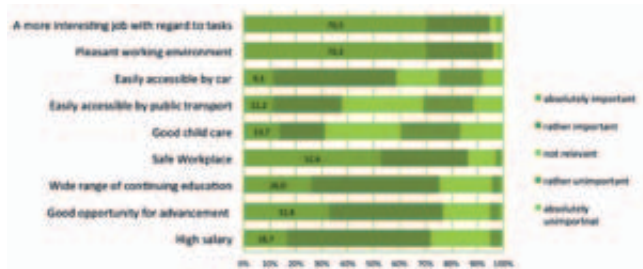Source: Institute for Work and Technology (IAT) 2012

Fig. 4 What Must a Company Offer to Make a Workplace Attractive?
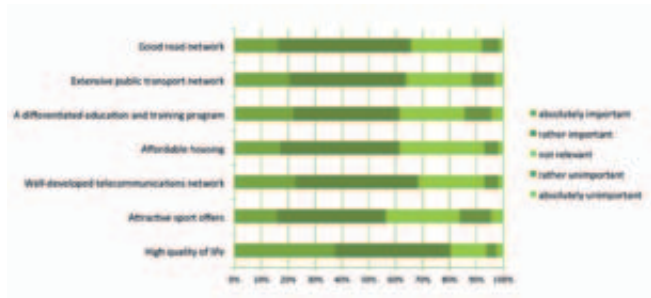Source: Institute for Work and Technology (IAT) 2012

Fig. 6 What Must a Region Offer to Make a Workplace Attractive?
Source: Institute for Work and Technology (IAT) 2012

Alumni and their Networks

The term alumnus is rooted in the Latin language and can be translated by fellow, companion or pupil. Once, it was used in the context of church education institutes. History shows that alumni networks are already about 200 years old and anchored in a first graduates' meeting in Yale. Foremost American universities influenced the term alumni and brought it into life in the sense of how it is used and understood today and defined for the BRAND project.

Alumni Networks – Old Idea in a New Spot

Already in the 1920s alumni organisations were initiated in America as part of private higher education institutes. Later on also public universities discovered alumni, formost as financial instruments. The strong commitment of American students and alumni for their alma mater relates to a different education system as authors such as Niebergall present. In contrast to numerous European higher education systems, the American system is strongly built on the pillar of students' fees, fundraising, sponsoring and donating activities. Likewise, American universities understand their mission in a different way compared to several European universities. Besides their existence as higher education institutions they are service providers. Doing so, enrolling for a study in America means getting a wide portfolio of educational, cultural and social services. Hence, choosing a university means choosing a later way of life. To maintain the variety of services, the quality of education and to assure a positive image, American universities depend on both, the material and non-material support of their alumni.

This strong sense of belonging to the alma mater is something that is already stimulated by universities during the study by intergrating the students into the academic system, engaging them emotionally in university relations and assuring a good quality of their education.

> **Alumni Definition in BRAND:** Alumni are graduates or former employees and fellows of universities or similar educational institutions. Consequently, alumni networks are university or similar higher education institutes' networks which in BRAND's definition, to operate in a successful way, are characterised as social networks. BRAND defines the latter by exchanging activities, which take place between the single network members and which generate social capital being an added value to all involved actors.

Alumni Networks as Competitive Factors

In Europe alumni networks were a niche topic. In the 1980s, with the changing role of European universities and the decline of public funds in some EU states, alumni networks were recognised as competitive factor and financial source. Nowadays, alumni relations is a must-have of each universities' strategy. To stay competitive and attractive for students, especially in times of internationalisation and demographic

change, European universities had to open up and create a new profile. The so-called third mission of European universities implies the transformation from knowledge generator to knowledge (service) provider and a strong cooperation with regions, their economies, policy makers and further regional authorities.

In that line, alumni are welcoming instruments which contribute to the new role of universities. With regard to regional development, alumni who remain in the regional labour market may be a link to regional companies and public institutions. Initiated collaborations between economy and research can promote the transfer of knowledge from universities in the region and increase the regional knowledge base. With regard to universities' competitiveness successful alumni relations can supply universities with a better reputation and image. Moreover, as alumni could occupy senior positions in business or in public areas, strategic contacts with these people can result in good ambassadors for the univeristies. By using alumni as guest lecturers, agents for intern-ships or for research projects can get students new insights in working life and this might open up new doors for their careers. Alumni as representatives of the public administration or policy can possibly appear as interceders in the political sphere - not to forget their financial resources that can be generated through alumni donations or contributions. Anyway, the success of alumni contribution always depends on the input level of individual members to the relation with their alma mater and by the network produced social capital as added value for each single network member. Hence, the members' commitment depends on (1) the benefit the members expect from the network participation and (2) the level of the connectivity to their university and the alumni network.

Thus alumni overtake activities as:
- ➤ members of the university advisory board
- ➤ university lecturers
- ➤ providers of job opportunities for students and graduates
- ➤ establishers of alumni careers
- ➤ ambassadors or prominent actors by placing advertisement
- ➤ acquisitors of new students
- ➤ mentors for students and graduates
- ➤ financial supporters to the university

Why Alumni Networks? – BRAND's Approach

The so-called brain flow issue influences border regions profoundly due to their specific socio-economic and geographical characteristics and put them even more under pressure to compete with metropolitan areas. Reasons for brain-drain are manifold. High-skilled workers often leave their domestic regions because of (1) a search for challenges, (2) a lack of information about the current regional economic situation and labour market and (3) a quest for available options to develop professionally opportunities – they do not think their own region can meet. These high-skilled workers may reckon that challenges in form of respectable jobs are mainly given in metropolitan areas. (Rural) border regions, such as main BRAND's regions, are much more likely to be affected by the problem of a minor inter-regional attraction for graduates. In addition, there may be an image that metropolitan areas offer a higher quality of life, a superior culture scene and increased number of choices for young families. Therefore, many high-skilled workers, living in border regions, turn their backs to their home and leave after their graduation or already before in order to search better opportunities elsewhere.

In fact, brain flow is a natural phenomenon, which should be seen regionally specifically influenced by tailor-made approaches. Thus, regarding regions more individually, peripheral and border regions ask for a differentiated view of high-skilled workers' retention and (re)-attraction. A mix of measurements and concepts for border and peripheral regions goes hand in hand with the development of a positive regional feeling in the sense of a warm place marketing – a concept of Gert-Jan Hospers that should

be transferred to the individuals before leaving the region and opens up the possibility for returning. Concerning the aim of binding and (re)-attracting graduates to the regional labour market, regions are apparently much more appealing and successful when addressing graduates from their own regional universities. In contrast, it seems to be much more difficult to attract graduates from other regions. In that context a special meaning goes to social networks, which is addressed in several labour mobility studies, to be in great part responsible for humans' choice to stay in, leave or return to a region. This idea brought BRAND to life. Alumni networks are social networks and part of regional universities. Thereby, they get very early in touch with students and keep in touch with later alumni. Thus, alumni networks have manifold chances to influence the choice of students to stay and alumni to return by (1) creating a warm feeling which binds students emotionally to the alma mater and by (2) informing alumni all over the world about newest university and economic developments in the domestic regions. Instrumentalising alumni networks as retention and (re)-attraction instruments may help regions to (re)-flow and gain their lost knowledge.
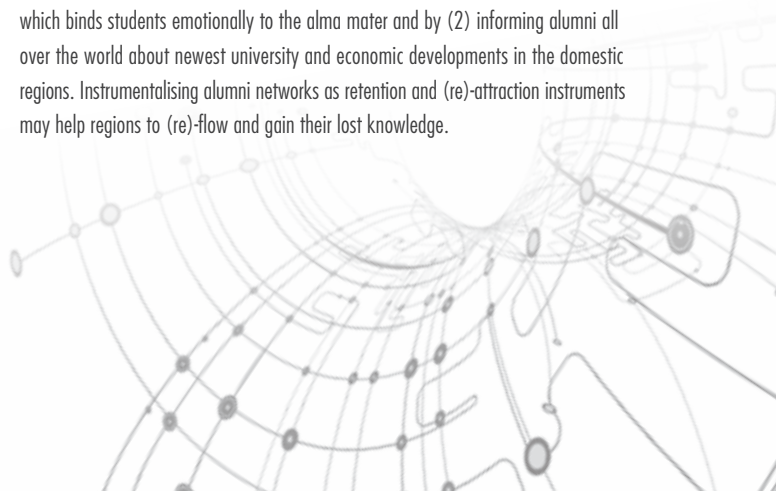
The Use of Alumni Networks as Instruments for Regional Economies

BRAND's Basic Idea

Although alumni networks, as BRAND will show, are foremost set up for the purposes of universities and alumni themselves, under certain conditions, they can also be used in a manner that directly contributes to regional development:

- ➤ as *instruments* for increasing regional attraction and
- ➤ as *instruments* for problem solving of regional skills shortage and thereby as retention and (re)-attraction instruments for high-skilled workers.

BRAND's basic idea can be explored by two assumptions:

Assumption 1: First of all, alumni networks are set up for the goals and benefits of universities and alumni, and not for regional development purposes. This assumption was tested for the in advance selected alumni networks in the sub-project regions. If alumni networks were already extensively used as instruments for the above-named regional concerns, the question would then be how to improve the networks' work and not how to extend the functions of alumni networks. Handling the first assumption brought the awareness of the fact that benefits for universities are equally benefits for regions. To give regional economy a new boost there were already founded several regional universities. This not only with regard to knowledge and innovation spillover effects, but also with respect to human capital.

➤ Alumni networks are NEITHER created to increase regional attraction NOR created to solve regional problems of skills shortage or the brain flow phenomenon. And if they would act in both terms, this would be just an unintentional side effect.

Assumption 2: Under certain conditions these unintentional side effects can become intentional effects to be attained. This means a shift in or an addition to the original goals of an alumni network's work.

➤ An existing (social) network, such as alumni networks are defined in BRAND, being created for a certain purpose can also serve different purposes.

Usually, alumni networks are created to solve specific problems and follow their defined aims such as:

- ➤ Keeping in touch with graduates
- ➤ Using alumni for the interest of universities and their image (e.g. lecturers, representants)
- ➤ Using alumni for raising funds (e.g. friendraising, fundraising, sponsoring, donating)
- ➤ Using alumni knowledge and abilities for universities' research activities (e.g. researcher alumni)
- ➤ Using alumni for student acquisition (e.g. ambassadors)
- ➤ Using alumni for the students' career (e.g. mentors, providers of internships)

To respond to these specific problems and aims alumni networks are differently shaped:

➤ as social networks among individuals, for keeping friendship and acquaintance,
➤ as formal contractual relationships; an alumni gets a free e-mail address, a reduction on university books and courses, access to information,
➤ as informal inter-organisational relationships for alumni and university actors where social networks that cross organisational boundaries can create a win-win situation like for instance job mobility for alumni and research contracts for the university,
➤ as affiliations were a membership is not about direct win-win situations but being a member is seen as an advantage itself, for instance because the affiliation suggests a certain quality of education or work based on this affiliation

BRAND was less interested in the service side of alumni networks. The project did not aim at the improvement of alumni networks' services as such, only if the change of certain services would be a condition to use alumni networks for broader regional functions.

In BRAND's opinion the social network and service side of alumni networks cannot be easily separated. BRAND's idea of a social network suggests the importance of an emotional engagement for a specific network. The link to the alumni network as representative of the university once part of (alma mater), is not simply a seller-buyer relationship. Social networks are community-driven (in both directions) and include social capital. Social networks thrive on relationships and are built on the fact that members share commonalities. Social networks are driven by relationships, emotions and in addition by expected benefits. These positive emotions can already be influenced during the study time. In other words: if a warm feeling about the network is transmitted and a kind of return investment is given alumni relations can succeed.

Examples of common established alumni network activities in the BRAND regions:

➤ Annual Journal
➤ Alumni Webpage 2.0
➤ Updating on Campus Life
➤ Contacts to the Career Centre
➤ Research Magazine
➤ Social Media
➤ Online Community
➤ Workshops
➤ Colloquium
➤ Regional Alumni Groups

➤ Annual Meeting/National Alumni Week
➤ Lifelong Email Address
➤ Exchange of Experiences
➤ Monthly Newsletter
➤ Information about Alumni Careers
➤ Alumni of the Year
➤ Guided Tours around the Campus
➤ Mentoring Programs
➤ Attendance in Labour Market Trades
➤ Groups of Interest

Analysis of Alumni Networks

If the benefits of an alumni network depend on who created the network for whose purpose and with what intentions, a further understanding of the goals, the organisation itself and its activities must be given before pronouncing recommendations on how alumni networks can be used - in a new function – as retention and (re)-attraction instruments of high-skilled workers.

To work out BRAND's idea one needs to understand:

➤ what alumni networks do,
➤ how they are organised, and
➤ what could be changed to fulfill new functions?

To answer these questions BRAND analysed the existing networks in the sub-project regions in two empirical steps:

➤ case studies of 13 alumni networks in five border *regions* (including some additional studies)
➤ a web-based inventory of more than 80 alumni networks in the five participating *countries*

The case studies were based on an alumni network questionnaire that addressed alumni network managers. The web inventory was based on the publically accessible website of the alumni network in the project countries. Both empirical steps were to gain insights in:

➤ goals of the networks,
➤ organisation and management of the networks,
➤ activities in general, and specifically retention and (re)-attraction activities of the networks.

Those case studies including interviews with alumni network managers set up a more in-depth idea about the functioning of these networks. A disadvantage of such a procedure is that the case studies can be typical or exceptional. The web inventory offered a more generalisable picture, but was limited in the depth of information. Given the fact that the BRAND material was drawn out of five western European regions there might be a bias in the conclusions. For instance, in the analysed countries the phenomenon of alumni networks is relatively new in comparison to the Anglo-Saxon countries and the universities still are publically funded and ranked. In that context, a competition between these universities might be less severe than in the Anglo-Saxon countries. Public funding might also be more regional in some of our case countries, so in these countries there is more to gain for the region if more students come and more graduates stay. All these factors might influence the role and priority of alumni relations and strategies of universities.

Results and Good Practices

Goals of BRAND's Alumni Networks

By whom and for what purposes a networks is created seems to be an important starting question for describing the analysed alumni networks. BRAND's empirical analysis confirms that:

➤ alumni networks are foremost created for the benefits of their universities and their alumni,
➤ regional effects, if at all intentional, are side-effects,
➤ goals, in terms of intentions and aims to be achieved, are strongly related with the actor that set up the alumni network,
➤ the initiative to create an alumni network, in most of BRAND's cases, was run by the universities themselves.

BRAND learnt that:

➤ if the universities themselves are the alumni networks' initiators, the defined networks' overall goal mainly overtops the aim of only keeping in touch with graduates and alumni,
➤ there are remarkable differences between general (overall) university alumni networks and faculty-related alumni networks. In the cases of general university networks, main members do not share the same common background. Thus alumni engagement is less strong, than the enganagement of faculty network members, who were enrolled to the same study topic. On the contrary, the general alumni networks cannot define clear activities addressing one homogenous group, such as faculty networks can.

Good Practice from Hedmark
One of our cases in Hedmark was an alumni network run by a professor as sideline, keeping informally in touch with former students, especially from abroad. The exchange between this professor and the former students was informal, but came from both sides, by emotional engagement and the discussing of both private and career-related issues. This described contact makes it possible that several alumni still visit the alma mater once a year personally and spill over their knowledge and information from abroad to the alma mater. Furthermore, the alumni act as acquisitors for new students abroad and are ambassadors of the university.

Good Practice from North Rhine-Westphalia
A case of a faculty-related alumni network in North Rhine-Westphalia presents tailor-made activities, on the basis of the same interests, addressing special requirements of their students/graduates (graduates book, awards) and alumni (community, mentor programs, events, newsletter, regional groups, advanced training, information on research and regional announcements) and even of regional companies (company membership, sponsoring activities).

Organisation and Management of Alumni Networks

To be a lively organisation, that can attain its goals, some coordination and management form must be given. BRAND's general conclusion of the case studies and the inventory is that:

➤ currently, the analysed alumni networks show in general a low level of professionalisation,

➤ the analysed alumni networks complain about too little human and financial resources,

➤ the number of employees and their full-time equivalence is low – typically most alumni networks are run by one alumni manager in half-time occupation,

➤ concerning the financing and organisational issues: the main alumni networks are part of a university and belong to the president's office or central university staff, also in means of funding,

➤ member fees present a relatively small proportion of the alumni networks' funds and

➤ less evaluation activities with regard to the alumni networks' activities and the quality of education at the university are accomplished.

Good Practices from Overijssel, Basel and North Rhine-Westphalia

Some BRAND cases show further income possibilities as supplements to alumni fees. A NRW faculty-related alumni network first sells its graduate book to regional companies to simplify their search for high-skilled employees, before offering it to inter-regional and national companies. Another general university network (the university is specialised on MINT-relations) offers a broad portfolio of financing opportunies for alumni alongside student fees – such as friendraising, fundraising, donating. Moreover, there is a possibility for companies to act as sponsors and support the university through education funds/stocks. The same case and further cases from the Dutch region Overijssel and the Swiss region Basel show that through a special amount of alumni fees, the members obtain special benefits like: journal subscription, support for start-ups, career counselling, library cards, cultural passes, qualifications, benefits for traveling and hotel booking, car rental services, alumni sports, favourable rates for insurance and cheaper public transport. These are examples of what BRAND calls ‚contractual benefits of an alumni network'.

Good Practices from Värmland and North Rhine-Westphalia
The alumni network in Värmland (Karlstad) is a good example for how to use alumni networks to evaluate the quality of the study at the university. The alumni in Värmland are asked by a questionnaire developed by the alumni network if they were satisfied with the quality of their education and the supervision at the university during their study time. Moreover, they are invited to give improvement suggestions, when needed. A faculty-related alumni network in North Rhine-Westphalia evaluates its own work by alumni questionnaires and interviews. Doing so, not only the success of the network can be measured, but as a side effect, its activities can be shaped even more tailor-made and can relate to alumni life cycle.

General Activities of Alumni Networks

BRAND's analysis shows that the studied alumni networks offer a broad range of services/activities for alumni (see box under BRAND's idea). As to be expected there is a correlation between the alumni networks' organisation degree and the range of different activities. Particularly, a high number of varying information and communication activities were found. Key instruments for informing and communicating are:

➤ networks' webpage
➤ social media
➤ newsletters
➤ annual journals
➤ online exchange platforms

As many analysed networks are general university organisations, addressing different alumni groups, most information and communication services must address a broad alumni range. A couple of faculty-related alumni networks concentrate on specific tailor-made news, informing their specific target groups.

Retention Activities of Alumni Networks

With regard to BRAND's idea the team aimed, during the alumni network analysis, at getting several examples of retention and (re)-attraction activities. BRAND distinguished between a networks' attraction activities (acquiring new students) and (re)-attraction activities (making alumni to return home). Although the retention and (re)-attraction activities were limited a number of examples was found.

Retention activities for students:
- ➤ guide tours around the campus, providing a personal link to the students and presenting to them the university advantages
- ➤ career colloquiums, career fairs
- ➤ internships and mentoring programs
- ➤ training courses
- ➤ job opportunities and traineeships
- ➤ information about regional entrepreneurs
- ➤ graduate books, through which regional companies get the possibility to directly contact graduates and attract them for a regional job before they decide to leave the region and search jobs elsewhere

The question with these activities is if alumni networks themselves see these activities as general services in helping members starting a job or really as activities to influence brain flow and contribute to regional goals.

Good Practice from North Rhine-Westphalia
To bind students at an early stage to the university, two general alumni networks in the region NRW arrange (1) regional field trips for students (introducing them to the company landscape in the border/peripheral regions as later career options) and (2) campus trips (introducing them to the university and providing them with a personal contact). Both activities can be summarised under the idea of warm place marketing.
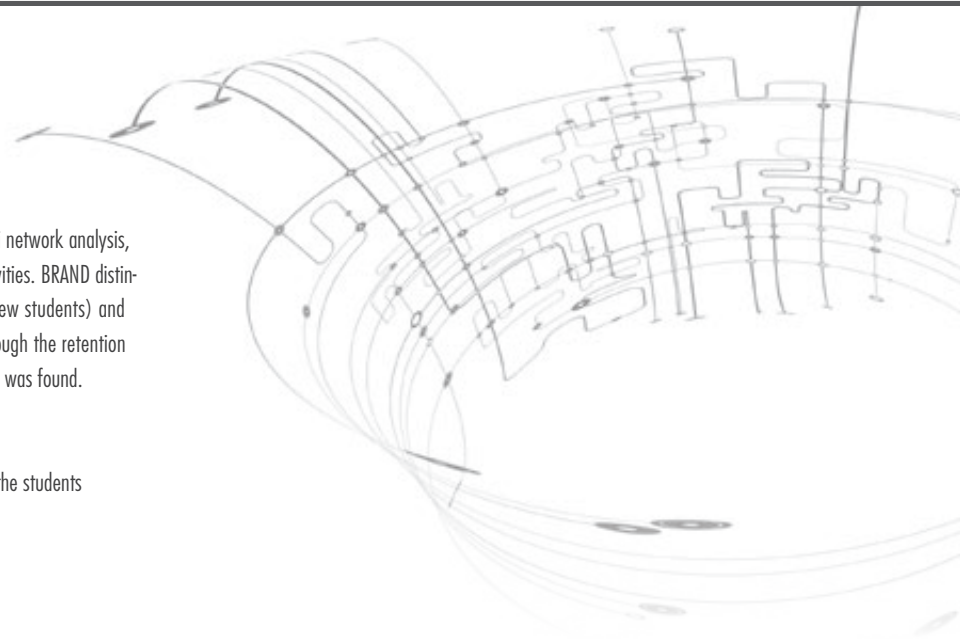
(Re)-attraction Activities of Alumni Networks

A precondition for (re)-attraction activities for alumni is to keep them informed about the regional economy and job possibilities. There might also be a practical help and career guidance for (re)-migrants. Currently, most of the analysed alumni networks establish:

➤ home coming events and reunion parties as annual events
➤ summer universities
➤ platforms for job opportunities
➤ knowledge spillover of research alumni

The named events can be used as (re)-attraction instruments when organising them not only in the sense of a party, but as personal care in the sense of a relationship marketing.

Good Practice from North Rhine-Westphalia, Overijssel and Basel
One case of a NRW alumni network closely cooperates with the regional marketing agency and several regional companies which act as sponsors of the network's home coming events. These home coming events function as both, exchange platforms and attracting instruments. The same alumni network started cooperations with researcher alumni to attract them for the alma mater and to spill over their abroad acquired knowledge both, to the university and to the region. A further alumni network in the region Overijssel not only keeps in touch with its alumni mentally, but also supports their start-up activities abroad by a stock. In return, the network expects their alumni to support the university and the region with their new-acquired knowledge and experience and to market the university abroad to potential students. In the Basel region, an alumni network umbrella organisation supports high-skilled returnees with career councelling and informs them about possible job opportunities.

Conclusion

BRAND shows that retention and (re)-attraction activities are currently not a key activity of the analysed alumni networks and asks how alumni network activities could be expanded and which conditions are needed to use them for regional brain flow? Using alumni networks as an instrument for retention and (re)-attraction means:

➤ to use the networks' communication channels to promote the region within and outside regional borders to once migrated (students/alumni)

➤ to keep alumni informed about regional job possibilities, developments in the domestic labour markets and the regional quality of life

➤ to use the networks' contacts with alumni to (re)-attract them to the home region for appealing jobs

➤ to interlink the knowledge of migrated alumni to the use in the home region

During the sub-project the BRAND team met several alumni network managers and directly asked for suggestions of how to use alumni networks for these special regional issues. Questioning them if retention and (re)-attraction activities make up a future strategy, their overall reaction was positive. As reasons for not picking up retention and (re)-attraction activities the network manager mentioned:

➤ missing manpower and financial resources,

➤ lack of professionalisation and internationalisation,

➤ missing cooperations with further regional actors or regional economy or further universities,

➤ missing cooperation with inner university organisations such as career centres,

➤ missing support of the alma mater itself and

➤ missing acception and popularity of their work.
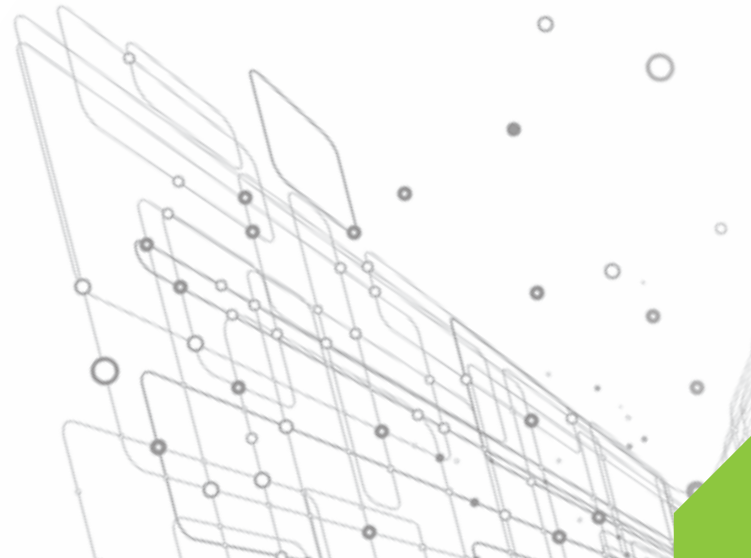
Recommendations

- ➤ To create alumni communities outside the region – the so-called regional groups to assure contacts among alumni and create spillover effects
- ➤ To use alumni for marketing and branding concerns: as university representatives and as regional representatives
- ➤ To attract alumni for regional branches/economic clusters related to the university or even faculty (e.g. MINT-related faculties)
- ➤ To use attracting instruments such as summer universities or home coming events to appeal alumni temporarily to the region
- ➤ To use the concept of warm place marketing to engage students already during their student time and later alumni emotionally to the university and the region
- ➤ To ensure students insights to the regional economy, company landscape and regional culture before they graduate and possibly leave the region
- ➤ To use alumni as ambassadors for student attracting and student acquisition
- ➤ To use alumni embedded in the regional economy (working for a regional company, being a regional entrepreneur) for mentoring, internships, and bridges between university and regional economy
- ➤ To develop evaluation instruments in order to measure the networks' success
- ➤ To set up an alumni board
- ➤ To orient services and activities towards alumni life cycle

- ➤ To develop special activities for scientists (researcher alumni), who are former students of the home university. Keeping in touch and providing them with special offers, projects, common publication possibilities, exchange platforms or consulting, could result in positive outcomes for the home university and region in the future
- ➤ To broaden networks' activities by cooperation with further alumni networks, umbrella organisations and further regional organisations
- ➤ To design new possibilities of knowledge spillovers from abroad, in case of no return of alumni
- ➤ To connect with further inter-regional alumni networks

Good Practice from North Rhine-Westphalia
An alumni network in the NRW region creates contacts to scientists, who are former university students (researcher alumni) to assure their knowledge spillover to the alma mater by initiating common projects, publications, offering them job possibilties, PhD and Post-doc programs.

… for Universities and the Alumni Networks' Board

➤ To embed the work and the alumni networks themselves stronger into the university, to raise acceptence among the university staff (stronger acceptance within the university)

➤ To foster the knowledge (re)-circulation by inviting alumni as guest lecturers

➤ To foster alumni networks' professionalisation by e.g. increasing full-time equivalence, to assure better working conditions for alumni managers and a better qualification degree of alumni managers

➤ To develop new fundraising concepts and instruments and to assure their acceptance within the university (student marketing)

➤ To create international study path (e.g. english lectures) to attract international students

➤ To interlink alumni networks with e.g. offices of fundraising, press offices, marketing and career centres for job offers and job matching into the region

➤ To raise universities' perception within and outside regional borders by cooperation with regional authorities such as marketing agencies

➤ To support evaluation instruments

➤ To open up to regional cooperation (universities' third mission)

➤ To follow not only an international, but also regional orientation (usually universities are interested in students from all over the world, hence they should regard their graduates as regional resource and not only as commonalities to sell over the world)

➤ To exploit alumni knowledge in the domestic region and use it for the university

➤ To offer PhD and Post-doc programs to regional and inter-regional alumni

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Good Practice from North Rhine-Westphalia
Two alumni networks in the region NRW show that alumni networks can be run professionally by occupying alumni network managers in full-time jobs. Furthermore, both networks cooperate with the fundraising office, the press office and the career centre – also sharing the same office accommodations, which simplifies the internal communication exchange and info flows.

… for the Regional Level/Inter-regional Level
➤ To create a direct link to alumni networks
➤ To support alumni networks mentally and with regard to finances (advanced performance)
➤ To integrate universities into regional branding and marketing strategies
➤ To intergrate universities into regional decision making regarding brain flow
➤ To integrate alumni networks and universities into the regional human capital agenda
➤ To foster triple (quadruple) helix activities
➤ To foster cross-border university cooperations
➤ To create better conditions for cross-border student commuters
➤ To foster student mobility
➤ To encourage regional firms to participate in international student exchange programs
➤ To encourage regional firms to better use the employees' (re)-migration (expatriates) to better absorb their skills
➤ To create an open, welcoming culture for alumni and further high-skilled workers from abroad (also at the firm level)

… for the National Level
➤ To improve labour market conditions for non-national graduates to stay in the country
➤ To contribute to the funding of universities and foster international cooperations
➤ To create incentives for international students and high-skilled workers

… for the European level
➤ To foster cross-border commuting
➤ To fund students', researchers' and lecturers' mobility

Good Practice from Overijssel
Through an international traineeship program, two universities in Overijssel try to keep graduated foreign high potentials in the region by offering companies the chance to hire them for a certain period of time under very attractive conditions. The Dutch work permit system offers high potentials extra time to orientate themselves on working in the Netherlands. The program helps graduates to find their way in to the Dutch labour market and to kick their career. The program also involves additional training for the job candidates.

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