

Summary of the interviews within the Regional Signal Panel in Ribe County

Introduction

We have carried out two rounds of interviews, and after the first round the methodology was evaluated. We decided that it was fine to carry out the interviews in groups of two, so that one functions as interviewer and the other reporter. Some interviews have been carried out as telephone interviews.

The first round took place in February 2006 and the second round in May / June 2006. We have noticed that it was easier to carry out the interviews in February, probably because the exam period in May / June takes a lot of resources from the people who carried out the interviews and because of many public holidays etc. We wanted to interview more people, but it has been difficult to arrange interviews with all people.

We wanted to try to write the summary, showing the differences between the 3 groups of experts could be made clear, but it has shown difficult. The reason for this is that the differences are not so clear – very often they say the same – or there are a few persons from each group saying the same, hence it is not enough to underline a clear difference between the groups. In some themes it has been possible, but in others not.

The overall impression about the interviews is that people has been satisfied to participate. People has expressed that they find it important to listen to regional actors and give more room to structured discussions and input. The aspect with alternative experts has also shown to be valued as something new, interesting and useful.

The group of interviewers was the following; Peter Karstensen, Business Academy West, Søren Haahr Jensen, Business Academy West, Anette Nielsen, CVU Vest, Henning Jørgensen, SDU, Torben Pedersen, AMU Vest, Leif Rasmussen, AMU Vest, Jørgen Thyrsting, VUC Ribe amt, Winnie Abildgaard, EU Vest and Henriette Hansen, EU Vest.



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People who have been interviewed:

Traditional experts from universities:

Flemming Just, Professor, SDU
Birgit Kjærside Storm, Polymer Centre
Hanne Tanvig, Centre for Rural Development
Kim Blumenfelt, SDU, Public Health
Svend Ole Madsen, SDU, Centre for SME studies

Private and political decisionmakers:

Ulla Adolf, Managing Director, Worklife Partners
Peter Blach, Managing Director, Offshore Center Denmark
Henry Koch, Technical Director, HTH Kitchens
Johnny Killerup Pedersen, Director, EU Vest
Johnny Søtrup, Mayor, Esbjerg
Flemming Enevoldsen, Managing Director Tulip and President Esbjerg Harbour
Betty Pedersen, Managing Director, JobCare

“Wildcards”

Gyrite Andersen, Cultural Consultant, Ribe County
Marianne Brinch-Nielsen, Student at the Business Academy
Jes Brinch Jensen, Former student at Business Academy and Aalborg University
Dorthe Jacobsen, Adult student at VUC (Adult Training Centre)
Kai Jørgensen, Director, Esbjerg Child Teatre
Henning Grønborg, Principal, Bakkeskolen Esbjerg
Axel Momme, Principal, West Jutland Musical Academy
Mette Bock, Cheif Editor, Jyske Vestkysten
Tony Brooks, Soundscapes





Globalisation

Globalisation is for most people understood as being a part of a bigger society or community. It gives a lot of opportunities but also a lot of challenges. Things become much more complex and new competencies are required for both companies, regions and citizens.

One traditional expert mentioned that we shouldn't talk about whether the globalisation is an opportunity or a threat to the region, it gives much more meaning just to talk about it as a REALITY to the region, that we have to deal with in a constructive way. It is a reality that traditional enterprises like VestFrost, Arovit etc. will close down, but Esbjerg will be able to adapt itself, because of its long strong culture to be dynamic, flexible and adaptable. Esbjerg has done it before; we went from fisheries to off shore, so we can do it again. Globalisation becomes a threat if we stubbornly try to keep old enterprises and traditional jobs.

Though, most people that we have interviewed saw the globalisation as an opportunity for the region, because the region has old traditions for being sales men and we have an easy access to European and overseas markets, because of the closeness to continental Europe and the sea ways. EU Vest was mentioned a few times as an important initiative to support the regional work to see globalisation as an opportunity and use it.....

If globalisation shall become an opportunity for the region, a few key words were mentioned again and again:

- Flexibility and "Flexicurity"
- Co-operation and alliances (political level, enterprises, education- and research institutions)
- Creativity, innovative competences and alternative solutions

But some put their opinion into a short term and a long term aspect. Within the short term, some saw the globalisation as a threat because a lot of jobs will go lost here and now, but within a longer term it can become a great opportunity because it opens up new markets and possibilities to export our know how. The textile industry in Denmark is a good example of an industry, which lost a lot of jobs some years ago, but which today creates more and more jobs in Denmark.

Within political initiatives, assistance to enterprises was mentioned several times, especially from private decision makers. Initiatives like EU Vest and assistance to change and adapt to the modern time we are living in, assistance to develop processes and products and assistance to understand that globalisation does not mean less jobs but new and different kind of jobs.

Those enterprises that will loose from globalisation are those that are not taking new, creative and alternative initiatives, and that creates co-operation and alliances outside the region – even outside Denmark.

If the region has to succeed in using the globalisation to its advantage, it is important that the image of globalisation as a bad thing, which creates unemployment is erased. It is important to express that globalisation does not mean LESS jobs but DIFFERENT jobs, and the important thing is therefore to point out these different jobs and train and educate people to be





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able to work in these jobs. Industry and the political level should go together to make serious investments in this field.

In relation to the “wild cards” culture, nature, long term investments, democracy and integration were mentioned as important factors in relation to globalisation. It was e.g. mentioned that it is only if you have something that you are not proud of, that globalisation becomes a threat. Therefore it is important to focus on integration and use the possibilities of the knowledge about different cultures and languages that foreigners bring to our region. We should be proud of our region’s nature and make sure that the region becomes a “socially active place”, where it is good to live. Democratic processes can be important for the globalisation as it brings diversity and ideas to the creative and alternative solutions that success and development within the global market demands.

We have a beautiful region, and one can be very effective anyway!



Work and Learning

Flexibility, “flexicurity” and mobility are very important for the development of the regional labour market.

Flexibility is e.g. more project- and determined periods of engagement, or that more people should work as consultants who serve several enterprises at the same time. This means that we should create better social security to independent people and entrepreneurs.

Most of the people that we have interviewed find that it should be a pleasure to work and that work that is autonomous is best, but that it requests a good balance between family life and work life, so that people do not become stressed and sick.

The most important qualifications for the future are seen as languages, creativity, ability to see new possibilities, “leadership”, knowledge presentation and transfer, cultural understanding and cultural management, and last but not least the willingness to be mobile.

An idea is that children should start learning on a much earlier stage in life; computers should be introduced in kinder gardens and languages should be introduced already the first years in school. Moreover, it was mentioned that Denmark should have an elitist college / university, to make sure that we get something good out of those pupils / students who are very intelligent and often get lost in the Danish schools system , because they are bored.

Educations should be more practical oriented, and students should on an earlier stage get into contact with enterprises. Enterprises should be motivated to hire more academics, maybe through trainee programmes. A lot of the interviewed people demand more co-operation between educational institutions and enterprises, and a proposal is, that universities also get evaluated on the effect they have on the development of SMEs, instead of only being evaluated on research results.

Those people that we have interviewed, representing educational institutions, agree that the region as such should focus much more on increasing the level of education in general and that there should be more bottom-up decisions within the educational sector, so that there can be more room for co-operation between the institutions, individual planning and creative / alternative initiatives. Educational institutions with a clear vision, mission and leadership are those that succeed.

It was mentioned from the group of “wild cards” that one of the biggest problems with the educational institutions in Ribe County is that they are not very focused on marketing themselves and the students. Businesses in Ribe County do not know what kind of students the educational institutions offer. E.g. only a few know how qualified students come from the media studies on both Business Academy and Aalborg University. The institutions use too much time on recruiting students because it provides money, but what does it help if the students cannot find a job after studying and go to Copenhagen.

The politicians should be much better informed about the offers from the educational institutions as to build better bridges between qualifications and business, so that the young people stay in the region.



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One of the advantages of the Danish labour market is that it is flexible – it is easy to hire people and find people with the right qualifications, but it is important that we in the very near future have a discussion about the professional “frontiers”. It is old fashioned the way we divide the work between professional groups. When you work in an enterprise, you should be able to do as many jobs as possible.

There should be more focus on creative and cultural inspired educations. Musical Academy is one of the educational institutions that is capable of attracting young people to the region. Maybe because these people value the beautiful region we have and get inspired from it.

It has been difficult to see any clear differences in the answers between the three groups of experts.



Governance and Policy making

All people interviewed find it important that there is some national guidelines, but the most important is that there is a strong local / regional strategy and political engagement.

A private decision maker pointed out the paradox that in the 1970'ties there was a lot of focus on experiments and creativity, what is what we need today. Not strong control and regulations, which is the tendency today, hence we are going to opposite direction of globalisation.

Most of the respondents do not find that the regional strategy in Ribe County is clear and focused, and they would like to see this, as it could also make the politicians more visible.

It is important to have strong regional / local politicians, and their most important task is to be visionary and able to point out possibilities for the region, prioritise tasks and then be consequent in their decisions.

All respondents find it good if politicians listen more to regional actors, both enterprises and citizens, as they are the ones who are supposed to live with the political decisions and initiatives.

It is important that everybody has the same "SWOT" picture of the regional situation.

Some of the respondents mentioned that it could be good to settle down a small regional council to support the regional decision process, and in this connection it was even mentioned a few times, that the activities of the Article 6 project is a good way to gather information.

Also the aspect of not asking the same people as those who are always invited is a good idea. It is important to invite visionary people with alternative opinions. There should be more room for political discussions / talks like the ones we have had during the interviews in the RSP.

The political decision process in Ribe county has been coherent for many years, because almost all the mayors in the county come from the same political party, so it has been easy to take big decisions about fields of co-operation. And the political opinion in the county has always been that there should be as less regulations and political initiatives as possible – only the framework conditions should be provided, and if the business environment was serious enough, they would know how to use it and what to do. But today, with the challenges of globalisation, it is probably not enough. We need more strategic decisions and prioritisations and a stronger political opposition, so that we can have more and better political and public discussions on different and important themes for the county – or for the future in the new region.....

Political and strategic decision should be based on broad discussions with regional stakeholders and well documented information, not on political / ideological principles.

Good politicians should be able to see things in a holistic way and be able to bring in different perspectives from other areas and matters.



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It has been an overall opinion in all three groups of experts that a more clear strategy for the region is a good idea, hence it is difficult to point out any clear differences between the 3 groups of experts.



Informed and engaged citizens

Most respondents find it important that citizens are engaged in the regional development process, but in reality it is difficult unless the subjects are very concrete.

Proposals like focus groups / thematic work groups or something like RSP came up, so that input from citizens can be structured. But this can not be done without some financial support to an animator. It is a very important factor as to connect the public administration with the civil society.

It is important to discuss how globalisation will affect all regional stakeholders, from the region, to enterprises and the individual. It is important to have a dialogue about how we assist each other to get the best out of the globalisation. A good example to be inspired from is “Project Arbejdsfastholdelse”, which was created as a study circle and turned into a country wide inspiration group that even affected the national policies on the area.

Politicians could learn a lot from citizens.

If citizens are invited to give input and be engaged, it is very important to show through communication, that the politicians actually listen to what they say and that they actually have a possibility to affect decisions.

Some respondents do not really find it realistic and necessary to engage citizens on a very active level; it is more important to establish a trust towards the elected politicians.

Some even think that engaging the citizens too much would make it even more difficult to have and follow a clear strategy for the region because too many opinions give too many compromises.

Media should be much more active in this field and meet people where discussions are taken instead of waiting to receive an invitation to show up and make a report.

It has been difficult to see any clear differences between the three groups of experts.

Society

The respondents do not all agree here. Of course they all find it very including that everybody can get an education in the Danish society, that people can stop working at an early age, if they need to do so. But on the other hand, it is exclusive that young people start working very late because the study for so long, and it is also exclusive that older people are not allowed to work a bit when the retire.

It is very important to focus more on the inclusive labour market and CSR.

In terms of the region as such, some of the respondents said that we are not good enough to attract people from other regions, though in that way, the region is not inclusive, which in some way is due to the fact that our region is not creative enough.

Integration and immigrants were mentioned many times here, and in general people do not think that we are good enough to integrate the immigrants in our society and to use the different cultures and languages that they represent to something positive for our societal development.

It is our own fault that a new lower social class has been established with immigrants because we do not do anything seriously about it. It is normal that they do not want to study if they end up driving a taxi anyway..... We should make political initiatives, which forces enterprises to engage immigrants or which favours enterprises that do.

There are no political votes in immigrants or e.g. people with mental illnesses. It is costly to do something seriously about the problems, so these subjects have instead become a kind of taboo in the public debate. Media could take a responsibility here to get these subjects out in the open. Activities should be more human centred.

Some respondents agreed that the society can gain double through integration. If immigrants and young people are integrated better on the labour market they will be able to take care of them selves and the society shall no longer pay for their living.

It was surprising to see how many of the private decision makers who actually pointed out how important closeness, prosperity and wellness is for the development of the society and the well-functioning of their enterprise. One even talked about how important it is to care about the traditional family values, because stable families makes a good foundation for the development of human beings and good employees.

A comment from one of the alternative experts is that our society in general should try to be as open as possible and as little conservative as possible.



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Ageing population

Some respondents believe that it is a special problem for our region as we have difficulties in attracting people with higher educations, and many young people leave to bigger cities, but others do not believe that our region has a bigger problem than other regions.

Young people have to be introduced on the labour market earlier and the old people have to stay longer.

Older people should stay longer on the labour market, hence it is important to offer special training activities for 50 +.



Culture

Most answers from the interviews show in a funny way that the cultural heritage in our region is two folded; on the one hand we have the old tradition; Ribe as a very old and historic city, honesty, a beautiful nature, which can be a sleeping pillow, and the traditional idea that it is best to stick with what we are used to. And on the other hand we have Esbjerg, which did not exist 100 years ago, a dynamic culture and idea that we can create what we want, we do not have to wait for others to change things. It would be fine to market this diversity as one of our specialities.

We are too serious and too reasonable and give too little support to people who want to try out something new. It is very healthy for the region, when new comers have the courage to introduce new ideas.

There is no social life in Esbjerg, which is also one of the reason that it does not become a “real” students city. It is a bit boring to be young in Esbjerg, and one of the biggest challenges for Esbjerg and the region is to be able to attract and keep the young people.

It is like the cultural heritage of the region is divided into two: The old culture, where people were not afraid to try new things and cross the frontiers, and the new culture saying that if you want to try something new, you very quickly got told that you shouldn't believe that you are something special.

The region has shown before that we can change things (from fish to off shore) and that people stood together to do this, we have to re-find that spirit and focus on new areas and move it forward together.

The interviews provide a general picture that the respondents would like to see more creativity, more willingness to take risks and a greater acceptance and support of people who want to try something new. We should not be afraid to talk about our successes.

We do not look to Copenhagen, but we try to look else where, and then we work a lot.

It is important to establish a regional identity so that e.g. people from Esbjerg are interested in what is going on in Ribe, and so that the Tønder festival becomes a regional happening and not only something that takes place in Tønder....

E.g. Billund and Esbjerg Airports should become South Denmark Airport and work closely together.

We should use time and resources to build up a regional identity and image and our nature and environment is excellent products to sell.

Regional Development

Most respondents touched upon the problems with the low level of education in our region, and said that it is important to create better overview and better and different co-operation between the educational institutions and enterprises.

An overall picture of the regions future key competencies is as follows:

- 1) *off shore industry*
- 2) *tourism*
- 3) *alternative energy*
- 4) *sound and media*
- 5) *health and wellness*
- 6) *Security*

If the region wants to exploit these areas it is important to mainstream from a very basic level, meaning that these subjects should be introduced in schools, colleges and universities, it should be clear to everybody that “WE WANT THIS” and the politicians should show political leadership in doing so.

Some respondents say that it is important that the region uses these themes to create a new image and a feeling of regional community. Again it is important to communicate a common and clear strategy to support the regional identity.

Some respondents say it could be a good idea to form a committee of ideas, a regional development committee or a regional “think tank”, with not more than 10 people. But an important issue about this is that the committee should not be composed with the usual people. They have been there too long and some of them are even too old.

The region has big potential, but the politicians have to work together in moving it forward through the establishment of a common identity and a common strategy.

We could easily become the region, know for its healthy life, happy people, good social concepts, initiatives within integration and the region which also focus on the alternative use of rural districts.

We should change the negative list of things that are not possible out with the positive list of things that we want to do and then do it. The region which is filled with public apple trees!

We have great possibilities to develop new concepts of tourism – natural tourism / cultural tourism / musical tourism / wellness tourism. We could develop concepts together with other cities, regions or countries. Why not go to London for walking and shopping and then go to South Denmark (Airport) with Ryanair afterwards to experience natural- and wellness tourism. We should think in partnerships and not always think that we can do things alone.

We should create more innovative development environments that combine education, business, creativity and culture.



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Institutional performance

On a general level, most respondents think that the framework conditions and public services in the region are good.

But more support to enterprises, the regional business development and especially to initiatives to build bridges between educational institutions and business and spot young talents.

EU Vest is a good service.

We are good to create results without too much money invested.

There are too many things which has been left for the enterprises to decide themselves. The politicians have not been pro-active enough and have not put goals and prioritise up for the region. Ribe County has been too passive when it comes to business development and regional development. We can profile the region much more.

Clear regional and local strategies are missing, and this is a statement which comes up in ALL interviews.

