

Regional Networking in Ribe County

This regional report is written on the basis of information from all article 6 partners from Ribe County, hence EU Vest (Business Development Center Vest), AF (Job Center), SDU (University of Southern Denmark), EAV (Business Academy West), AMU (Professional Training Center for adults), CVU Vest (Center for Higher Education), VUC (Basic Training Center for adults)

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The organisation's / the region's experiences with regional co-operation

- With whom do you co-operate?
- How do you co-operate? On a formal basis or an informal basis?

On the basis of the practical experiences from the partners, the regional co-operation within Ribe County can be divided into three levels;

- 1) The political level
- 2) The project oriented level
- 3) Operational level

The political level

EU Vest

EU Vest was founded in 1998, as a strategic decision between the county, and 4 municipalities, that they could co-operate in the area of international development projects. Since then, the field of activity for EU Vest has grown into regional- and business development, and the co-operation has enlarged from the five original partners, till that 12 of the 14 municipalities in the county are involved in the work of EU Vest.

EU Vest has a political board of administration, which consists of the county mayor, the mayors of the 12 municipalities and a member of the County Council. The board meets 4 times a year and decide on the overall development strategy for the region, which is equal to the overall strategy for the work of EU Vest.

A very important aspect is the corporation that has come into existence between the mayors in the region, as they meet regularly as members of the board of EU Vest. This gives a coordination of the business development in the region.

The political strategy for EU Vest is transformed into concrete areas of activities through the Regional Council, which consists of members from regional enterprises, educational institutions, the regional labour council, the social partners and a few members of the board.

The Regional Labour Council

The regional labour market council consists of 22 members and a chairman. The council is the political committee for the employment service and its tasks is to fix the priorities and dimensioning of the use of education/training, job training, monitor the regional labour market and other measures in the regional labour market policy.

The members of the council are representatives from:

- employers' associations
- unions
- the county and the municipalities
- one person represents organisations for disabled persons





KUBA

KUBA is a formal co-operation between the municipalities, the co-ordination councils, association of municipalities, the job center, the regional labour council and the county, with the main objective to create a flexible and dynamic labour market through

- 1) creation of a holistic understanding of the labour market policy and
- 2) creation of new methods to co-operate and create activities at the labour market.

Besides the formal political cooperation arrangements, representatives of the partners in the project, often are invited for political meetings on an informal or ad hoc basis to give their view on specific aspects of the development in the region.

The project-oriented level

EU Vest

The most common way for all Danish partners to co-operate with each other is on a project-oriented level.

EU Vest has in it's political support an overall mandate only to implement the regional strategy through practical projects between enterprises and other regional actors, be it public or private.

EU Vest initiates or takes part in regional development activities and the development of projects – especially EU projects – with participation of private companies, public institutions and institutions for education.

EU Vest is made as a supplement to the public business advisers in the municipalities.

Furthermore EU Vest is established also to support the public institutions, universities and all companies in the region, concerning international project opportunities. EU Vest offers information about international possibilities for funding as well as contact to relevant international partners.

SDU

SDU participates in a wide range of development and research projects with regional partners. These projects can either be regional, national or international in their scope, and very often the projects are also co-financed by either national or European funds.

Many of the projects have their starting point in regional aspects and regional demands, where SDU typically contributes by organizing and developing information in the initial development phase.

SDU also participates in various fora, development groups and councils on a local or regional level, where they either participate with an unbiased mandate or with their special knowledge within a certain field or to represent their interests as a higher education institution.

The educational Centers

The educational centers work together on an ad hoc basis within the scope of various projects with enterprises, EU Vest, Unemployment Funds, Labour Unions, municipalities and AF, as to provide professional training and education to either unemployed or employed people.

These projects are either funded completely by the enterprises themselves or co-financed by national funds or the European Social Fund.



The operational level

AF is probably the organisation, which has the most structured regional co-operation on the operational level, hence AF co-operates on a daily basis with the unemployment funds, the educational centers and the municipalities. The co-operation is of course focused on the development within the labour market, the administration of the unemployed and activities to get the unemployed into jobs.

It is important that the guidance offered by the unemployment funds and AF is coherent. The unemployment funds and AF cooperate on a formal basis in a common committee, where they coordinate the guidance and exchange information on the local labour market and on an informal basis in relation to individual unemployed persons.

The education centres plays a key role in ensuring a well functioning labour market. When the unemployed person and AF estimates that professional training is the right tool to get them a job, or to bring them closer to the labour market, the required training is purchased at the training center. Both the educational centers and AF are responsible to ensure the supply of labour force with the right skills.

At present, AF is responsible for persons qualifying for unemployment benefits and the municipal administrations are responsible for cash benefit claimants, but in the future, the cooperation between the municipal administrations and the national employment service will be much closer. The responsibilities will still be divided but the two authorities will reside in the same house and will use the same methods in order to provide job for the unemployed people.

The educational Centres

The educational centers work together on an ad hoc basis concerning activities for the unemployed as well as employed people, networking and exchange of knowledge and know-how. The educational centers also have seats in the Regional Labour Market Council with the aim of exchanging information as to define areas on the labour market, which can be supported with education.

EAV is a special case in this connection, as they have been appointed "Regional Centre of Excellence" by the ministry of education, meaning that they are obliged by law to create a broad regional co-operation.

On the formal basis EAV has formed an advisory board consisting of 16 representatives from different companies and regional labour unions and other associations. The advisory board meets 4 times a year where they comment on the strategy, new initiatives, come up with innovative ideas and more. Moreover, special advisory groups consisting of representatives with specific relevance are connected to several of the educational programmes at EAV.

It is a main goal for EAV to get all students in contact with companies during their studies and app. 90 % of the students write their final project together in co-operation with a company. This also gives the academy valuable informal contact with the regional companies.

Like EAV, SDU establishes close cooperation between students and enterprises, as the students either work on concrete practical problems in enterprises during their studies or write their thesis in close cooperation with one or several enterprises in the region.

Also CVU Vest is a special case as they offer further education within all kinds of areas within the social, health and pedagogical sectors, hence they have a certain amount of regional co-operation with specialist groups within the social sector as to discuss and identify certain needs for education and / or development of new training activities. CVU Vest has been appointed a National Centre of Excellence for Social Inclusion and has therefore a wide network of partners regionally and nationally.



The organisation's / the region's experiences with transforming information into knowledge, to be used on a strategic level

- **Which kind of methods do you use?**
- **In which form is the knowledge presented?**
- **Describe your experiences with this form of presentation – advantages and disadvantages.**

EU Vest

The organisational structure behind EU Vest serves as a good tool to disseminate knowledge and national and international trends, which can be of influence for the regional development.

As mentioned earlier, 4 board meetings are held each year, and in connection to these meetings, two other meetings are held. The first one is the meeting between the directors from all municipalities and the region, and the second meeting is within the regional council.

EU Vest has the responsibility to gather information from several sources, and transform the information into development-oriented plans of action, which is presented to the politicians and the directors, who discuss and make the overall decision to accept, change or reject the plan.

Two years ago EU Vest started a new procedure, namely to put the plan of action on our website and distribute it among our main partners to public discussion and feedback.

AF

AF gathers systematically information about the supply and demand of labour force, bottleneck problems etc.

The information is gathered from different channels:

- A panel of enterprises (roughly 100) responses every quarter a questionnaire about their demand for manpower
- A network with key figures from 40 enterprises I every quarter interviewed about the development in not only their enterprises but also in line of business
- Other key figures such as the leaders of service to enterprises in the municipality administration, leaders in the education system are interviewed every quarter
- We study articles in newspapers, economical forecasts from the ministry of finance, analysis of the labour market or business lines, statistics about employment and unemployment etc.

The information is worked up in a quarterly report, which forms the basis for guidelines for the efforts in the organisation. The report is available for AFs collaborators on the Internet.

One of the positive results of the work through the information is a survey over jobs distributed over:

- Areas with bottleneck problems
- Areas with difficulties in recruitment of manpower with specific skills
- Areas with few unemployed persons / a small manpower reserve
- Areas where it is possible to find a job but only if you are well qualified for the post or are willing to work at late hours or are mobile and able to work on out-of-the-way places
- Areas where the unemployment rate is high

The survey includes 165 different types jobs.

Job seekers can use the survey as a guide to good employment opportunities. The survey is also used as a part of the guidelines that are determining factors for the support to education or upgrading of skills that AF can offer to unemployed persons.



The educational centers

Ribe County is one of the regions in Denmark with the lowest rate of education; hence some years ago, a regional competence council was established in Ribe County, with the main aim of putting competence development on the political agenda. Some of the educational centers participated in the council's work, but unfortunately the council did not have the power to change the general attitude towards this important area. As the project did not manage to have the political influence as expected, a new project has been created by EU Vest, where we try to focus on the managers of enterprises, to get them to understand the importance of competence development.

A broader strategic co-operation between the educational centers in the region would definitely be a positive thing for the dissemination and supply of education and training, and for the general understanding of competence development as a strategic tool for regional development.

The educational centers though use the (estimated) regional development as a strategic tool for their individual strategic planning and development. Hence, new educational activities are adopted as to meet the training needs of the regional and local industries and enterprises.

Information is usually gathered from formalized dialogue with regional and local enterprises, reports and formal and informal networking with the AF, EU Vest and the local Chambers of Commerce.

The organisation's / the region's experiences with identification of regional key competencies and regional intelligence¹

- **How do you do this?**
- **On the basis of which kind of information and knowledge?**
- **Which kind of organizations co-operate to do the work?**
- **How are the key competencies presented to the regional stakeholders?**
- **How do you make sure that you have acceptance and understanding on a political and a practical level at the same time?**

EU Vest

In the county of Ribe most people knew that the offshore industry and the plastic sector were big and important. Many people knew that the the university had a special faculty working with these two sectors. Some people knew that there were EU, national and regional networks and projects in these two sectors – and a few people could see that we didn't get the optimal output of these activities due to lack of cooperation and common objectives.

Our problem was thus not so much identifying the sectors, but how to organize and structure the needed change from having a lot of independent uncoordinated actors involved in the sectors to a common platform in order to use the sectors for regional development

Through EU Vest we had the perfect political platform where all mayors at the local and regional level were represented, and with the regional business council we also had a good platform for discussing these issues – These two organs were essential to establishing the foundation for changing things within the two sectors. When the politicians and leading business people and the social partners said that we want to use these two sector for our regional development it became much easier to come to the universities and companies and say that we want you to coopearte with us in finding new ways of developing your sectors.

It was not as much a top-down decision as it was a top decision to start the the bottom-up proces.

¹ Please see project application page 29 for further explanation of regional key competencies, as it is used in this project.





We had through other projects – especially “the Learning Region” – realized that we could only ensure regional development and growth by focussing on key sectors and to ensure cooperation and knowledge sharing between the political, academic, business and social partner levels.

It was clearly a top-down decision (from the politicians) to say: “We need to build on existing strengths but we need even more to develop, create and support new activities within these sectors. We are strong in the two sectors but we need further development to stay one step ahead. We want you to find the solutions for the future, we will support you, but you have to find the practical tools to implement the needed changes.”

EU Vest was the institution who was made responsible to ensure the changes. Two working groups were established. The working groups consisted of 7 persons. 2 from universities, 1 from knowledge centers, 3 from companies, 1 from business organisations, 1 from social partners and 1 one from EU Vest.

Their objectives were to make recommendations towards institutionalizing the cooperation, establishing objectives for the cooperation, develop 5 project ideas and find sources of funding.

It was a political objective to put these people together but the working groups (and several seminars with more participants) were the real foundation for the future. Without support, interest and commitment from all parties it would never have worked.

In line with the strong Danish tradition we quickly established an organisation where institutions and companies could become members and in line with the traditions in EU Vest we were focused on concrete projects that these new organizations could work on. We established Offshore Center Denmark and Polymer Center Denmark with the philosophy: Bring people together, keep them together in a group and make sure they have something concrete to do together.

After 12 months of work in the working group the politicians gave 2 mill. Kr (280.000 euro) per year for 3 years and through a national fund we managed to get the same funding from the state.

The two centres got established in our Science and Research Park with two new managers and with practical assistance from EU Vest.

EAV

Through Their contact with local companies EAV has tried to identify areas where the region is especially strong and where there is certain needs for specialised programmes. As an example EAV has recently been approved to supply two programmes aimed at the offshore industry, which is one of the key competencies of the region.

Another example is that EAV in their marketing programme offer special classes in Chinese language and culture. This is done because of strong demand from local companies.

The organisation's / the region's experiences with developing strategies, that support the regional development?

- **How do you do this?**
- **On the basis of which kind of information and knowledge?**
- **Which kind of organizations co-operate to do the work?**
- **How are the development strategies presented to the regional stakeholders?**
- **How do you make sure that you have acceptance and understanding on a political and a practical level at the same time?**

EU Vest





The Regional Council of Business is the specialist forum in EU Vest and the members are representatives from regional enterprises, private consultancies, social partners, business associations and educational institutions. The member's role is to give professional guidance to EU Vest.

The Regional Council of Business meets 4 times a year, where EU Vest prepares descriptions of future trends and possible activities, which is then discussed and developed and afterwards discussed and decided in the political board.

The educational centers

A recent report showed that there is only a small amount of innovation and entrepreneurship in the region. Therefore EAV applied to the ministry of education to get permission to be a knowledge base for innovation and entrepreneurship with special focus on the global development and global challenges. EAV received this permission in December and is now in the course of developing a strategy - together with other local actors - on how to solve this regional problem through education, training and regional co-operation. Later in the process EAV will try to build up an innovation house together with other local educational institutions.

The organisation's / the region's experiences with working with scenarios

- o **How do you do this?**
- o **On the basis of which kind of information and knowledge?**
- o **Which kind of organizations co-operate to do the work?**
- o **How are the development strategies presented to the regional stakeholders?**
- o **How do you make sure that you have acceptance and understanding on a political and a practical level at the same time?**

SDU

As such the University has not been involved in an overall development of scenarios for the regional development in Ribe County. However on a specific basis and through individual involvement the University takes part in the development of contributions to scenarios concerning innovative projects where additional knowledge is needed in the initial phase. This may as an example be through impact analysis where the likely employment and income generation from a project is assessed. Often local partners wish to involve the University in development projects to get an unbiased view of the potential before embarking on further investigations.

In specific cases this may be based on local data from similar activity or data from the national bureau of statistics (Danmarks Statistik) and international statistics.

Local business organisations, the county, municipalities and stakeholders co-operate to do the work. In some cases national level organisations such as the County Research Institute (AKF) are involved.

The development strategies are presented to the regional stakeholders through conferences and reports and through comments on such reports made by consultants.

The University typically presents investigations and receive feedback through meetings and conferences if such are arranged.





The organisation's / the region's experiences with a strategic use of the social dialogue²

- **Which background do your organization have to work with the social partners and the social dialogue?**
- **Which organizations in your region co-operate within the frame of the social dialogue?**
- **What is the main goal for your work with the social dialogue?**
- **Have you registered any benefits within the work of the social dialogue in your region? If yes, which kind of benefits?**

On a general level

When talking about the social dialogue, it is worth mentioning that on a national level, we work a lot with the concept of "The Inclusive Labour Market", which as a concept has the objective to create a labour market, which is able to contain as many people as possible, so that these people through their work becomes active participants in the society.

The principle within the inclusive labour market is that the effort, which is taken towards groups of people who are either excluded or has a risk to be excluded from the labour market, becomes more individual and differentiated, and that it focuses more on the co-operation with enterprises within the private sector.

A result of the inclusive labour market is the creation of local "Co-ordination Councils", which can be created in one single municipality, or as a co-operation between several municipalities. The objective of the co-ordination councils is to create co-operation between local actors, who can contribute to the development of the local labour market, as to create a place for everybody – also people with less ability, no matter if it is a physical handicap or limited professional competencies. Hence, within the scope of these councils, the education centers have a good opportunity to co-operate and contribute to the development of the labour market, especially VUC, AMU and CVU Vest.

The co-ordination councils create and implement projects, which benefit the individual, where he or she receives training as to enter the labour market or as to have better possibilities to stay there.

The co-ordination councils focus in their work on the social dialogue, and put an effort in training the shop stewards to be able to see the benefits of strategic vocational planning and of preventive measures in relation to the working environment. In this way, the employees have a better opportunity to keep up a good dialogue with the management.

AF

Very often unemployed persons have problems in addition to unemployment for instance with their health. They can be too sick to go to work and too healthy to get sickness benefit. Instead of sending the unemployed person from one authority to another, AF gathers the authorities at a meeting, where also the unemployed attends.

The participants will typical be: The unemployment fund, the municipal administration, the employment service and the unemployed him- or herself.

² Social dialogue is the term used to describe a joint consultation procedure involving the social partners. It involves discussion, joint action and sometimes negotiations between the social partners, and discussions between the social partners and government institutions.





The common focus is on bringing the unemployed person into employment or closer to the labour market. It is an essential foundation for the meeting that the unemployed person plays an active role.

The organization has very good experience with these meetings. They are difficult to arrange, many calendars have to be free at the same time but when this barrier is overcome, all parts benefit from it. The main advantages are that the problems are solved faster than else, at a lower cost and in a way that commits all parts to contribute to the solutions.

CVU Vest

The department for development in the social field has written a textbook about the inclusive labour market, having worked with it in education and practice in cooperation with teachers at the school of social work.

The round table dialogue is developed in cooperation between the municipal health departments, doctor, unions and employers in order to help people with some kind of health problem that has arisen to remain at work. The idea is to gather the relevant partners including the person in focus at one meeting, where nobody is supposed to have more power, than the other and in dialogue negotiate the best obtainable solution. The method is now widespread and most health departments use the method and the method is spread to other parts of social work as well. CVU Vest has also developed an educational course for students, which is part of the education as social worker.

Conclusion

The conclusion in this regional report has been discussed and decided upon during a meeting between the regional partners in the project, and the issues are as follows:

- The partners do not have a holistic view and understanding of the concrete activities in the different partner organisations.
- The partners do not have a holistic knowledge about the traditional regional development conditions, and an understanding of what we can do together to change things – especially in connection with the work that we all do towards SMEs.
- The partners need more information about the development on the labour market.

On the basis of the discussions we have had during work package 2, it has been decided to continue the development work in our region in the following way:

- During the project we will make sure that the regional partner meetings take place at the partner organisations so that all of us get a clear picture of each others organisation, assignments and “products”
 - o On the basis of this understanding we will try to discuss and decide how we can establish a better co-operation among us – that is to say a better supply of SME related services - out from the philosophy that we should not all of us be good at doing everything, but acknowledge what each of us is good at, and stick to that.
- Every three months AF will arrange regional meetings, so that all partners can get a better understanding of the development on the labour market and eventually discuss common activities.
- SDU will make a short report about the traditional regional development conditions and an overview of what the research work has shown is possible to create within regions like ours.
 - o We should be more aware of the conditions and be capable of using them in our practical work.
 - o As a region we should focus on reconvention, adaptability and support
 - o In relation to our work with SMEs it is important for us to focus on their capability to coordinate and to co-operate interactively.
- In relation to the meetings that we will have during the project, we will make sure that we discuss a number of themes that are relevant to us and to our region. Until now these themes have been mentioned:





Regional Key Competencies

- a way to manage structural changes (ATG)

- “Wellness “ as a new regional key competence / regional development potential.
- What kinds of new employment should we try to support in our region.
- The service sector and a stronger focus on public – private partnerships.
- A better and more efficient partnership and structure in relation to bigger dismissals from regional enterprises. (Inspiration from our Belgian partners)

With contributions from,
EU Vest (red), AF, SDU, EAV, AMU, VUC, CVU Vest
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