

***Regional Mission Impossible?
The Twente Region and the University of Twente***

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Abstract

A well-functioning regional innovation system requires consensus and unanimity among the actors that is believed to be achieved through shared policies and strategies. Nevertheless, these policies and strategies fail to be regularly translated into action, which then impedes regional development. This study attempts to explore the reasons behind the discoordination in question. It specifically looks at the university as a key actor contributing to regional growth in close cooperation with various stakeholders. To this end, it draws on the case of the University of Twente in the Netherlands, a historically regional and strategically entrepreneurial university. The study relies on documents and semi-structured open-ended interviews with academics, university administrators, and their strategic partners in regional development. The research reveals that the University, once a visionary of regional economy and culture, is now struggling to respond to local needs unless they meet the priorities of teaching and research and bring forth massive sustainable funding. Regional stakeholders, in their turn, pursue own agendas, communicate only with university managers, and disagree with traditional academic goals. The study sheds light on knowledge asymmetry, absence of clear intermediaries, lack of long-term commitment, and misalignment of stakeholders’ interests and expectations which hinder effective policy formulation and coordination. Likewise, it highlights the complexities of human resources and personalized networks – their diversity, multidimensionality, and discontinuity make it harder to maximize mutual penetration and reciprocal benefits. This suggests that the key to the research problem is not strategic policy coordination, but coordination of human agents.