

# Universities and the development and positioning of place

## Universities and a sense of place

If your place hasn't got one – you probably want one, or at the very least to be able to link your place to the nearest institution or to one not far away that has a reputation that can only enhance your own.

The European Union has encouraged through the use of its structural funds the development of university capability in the less advantaged parts of the Union. In Cornwall in the UK for example the establishment of the Combined Universities in Cornwall (CUC) on a new campus in the centre of the county, brings together existing higher education provision, but also, critically, adds the weight of the two nearby established universities at Plymouth and Exeter.

The CUC provides the principle pivot for the economic development of Cornwall as a location, helping to add new definition and new opportunity for the development of industry and people and the attraction of new industry and new people to the county. With time, the new university will help to redefine Cornwall and its sense of itself as a place and the perception of it as a place from outside.

## Universities, R&D and location specialization

Innovation and new ideas for industry born from academic research and corporate and academic collaborations on R&D start to convert a university's simple presence in a location into one that adds value and defines that location and indicates its potential development options for the future.

Those who are furthest ahead in bringing together public sector policy makers and location promoters with academic and industry leaders – both big and small – will be the most successful locations of the future.

Critically, the academic / corporate research, new ideas, innovation process has to be encouraged to continue to bring forward new ideas / new opportunities. In an ever increasing globally competitive environment, encouraging those new ideas and then knowing how to exploit them for the benefit of your place will be the key to sustained economic success. Ensuring that public sector support is effective and understanding and that the industry structure of

your place has sufficient capability and dynamism to exploit the new opportunities will be vital.

Finally on this, the capabilities of your university, its specialisation and its surrounding industry help to define a sense of place and 'what we are good at' for all of the people who live there. As part of the overall approach to place marketing this is an important part of the place definition toolbox.

## Universities and investment promotion

Many investment promotion agencies and national, regional or city development agencies in recent years have realised the value of working with and advocating their university or universities as part of the development of and promotional pitch for their location or place.

Universities of course not only attract people from the home country, but also other nationals wanting to study in a different country / study at an acknowledged university centre of excellence. A comprehensive place marketing strategy has to take advantage of these 'visitors' to ensure that they leave with and take with them in to their later research / business life a clear message about all of the good things that your place offers for people like them.

## Swansea University

A recent announcement in the UK of a prospective £20m investment by IBM in Wales, in 2005, to develop a life sciences institute in collaboration with the University of Swansea, creating in excess of 200 high technology jobs and a significant body of new spinout companies, serves to underline – if it was needed – the importance of Universities in economic development and the attraction and retention of corporate investment.

For more on the importance of universities to the place marketing process and how The Place Marketing Company can help you more effectively promote and market your place, please contact us on:

+44 (0) 7921 132887 – or visit our website below.

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