12 Keeping Talents in the Region?

Educational Internships and Their Impact on Regional Development

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Abstract

This chapter focuses on how internships within higher education contribute to place-shaping and regional development. Especially how employees and students engage with regional partners to develop education by co-creating internship projects. Strategies concerning regional development are set into play when higher education institutions (HEIs), private and public sector collaborate to provide education. The empirical focus is on academic disciplines in Norway that quite recently have established student practice through internships, namely sociology, history, and business administration. We follow up this practice element by analysing the perspective of educational fields and different public and private actors within a regional setting to provide internships for students. The overall research question is this: *How do internships contribute to educational and regional development from the perspectives of HEIs and regional actors?*

Introduction

In the literature regarding sustainability in place-shaping and regional development, there is an increasing focus on education, as well as economic development, planning and regeneration, health, transport, housing, and security (Collinge et al., 2010). However, as part of their mission, universities are expected to contribute to regional engagement, together with teaching and research (Benneworth & Fitjar, 2019). Although university ambition and strategy involve forming partnerships with regional actors to develop the region, it is when employees and students engage with the regional partners that the strategies are set into play. Traditionally, university colleges have many collaborative activities with the professional context they educate for. Recently, there is a developing political and societal perception that university education or their programmes lack relevant connectedness to working life (NOKUT,

2019). Simultaneously, government and higher education institutions (HEIs) underscore that learning by doing is a good learning mechanism for students. In addition, such interaction can provide important feedback to the HEIs to ensure that the education curriculum and content are up to date and coherent with the demands of society (Arbo, 2019). Teacher, nurse, and medical education are typical examples where in-house training is crucial.

This type of practical course element has been rather missing from a range of academic fields. In this chapter, we focus on academic disciplines in Norway that quite recently have established student practice through internships, namely sociology, history, and business administration. We are following up on this practice element by analysing the perspective of organizations, including educational fields and public and private actors within a regional setting, to provide internships for students. As this arrangement is fairly new, we can expect limited knowledge on how to align theoretical knowledge with needs from practical work life, as well as few norms and anticipations of how to develop the internships to improve education and contribute to regional development.

Regions can be considered as territorial places with characteristic natural resources and related knowledge producers. The territories are embedded in specific regional innovation systems (RIS) where local and global resources are flowing (Benneworth & Hospers, 2007; Cooke, 2005). Such RIS contains networks between private and public actors and civil society where coproduction and innovation can take place (Peer & Penker, 2016). Locating HEIs has been recognized as a political instrument to spur regional development since the middle of the last century (Peer & Penker, 2016), and the literature on the role of HEI related to regional development is extensive (Caniëls & van den Bosch, 2011). HEIs can contribute to coproduction and innovation through employees and students participating in knowledge production (Peer & Penker, 2016). Internships can contribute to ensuring human capital within regions and building regional coalitions necessary for regional development (Jongbloed, 2010). Nonetheless, there remains no automaticity in development. Regional effectiveness depends on the willingness of regional actors to cooperate (Peer & Penker, 2016).

Studies focusing on the regional role of HEIs suggest that major challenges, cultural as well as structural, remain (Benneworth, 2018; Pinheiro et al., 2018) and that key tensions exist between core teaching and research tasks and processes of local engagement by academic communities (Benneworth et al., 2017). There is an emerging consensus in the literature that to ensure the sustainability of HEIs' regional mandates one needs to consider both the structural and cultural complexity and the dynamic institutional and technical environments (Goddard et al., 2016). National policy arrangements and their focus on efficiency and global excellence (world university rankings, external funding, and so on) often act as major barriers to local academic engagement (Benneworth et al., 2017). Based on research excellence, HEIs generate income from global actors (Benneworth & Hospers, 2007), but such strive for excellence can be quite distant to mundane activities within the universities and cooperation

with regional actors. Based on studies regarding internship and regional development, the focus has mainly been on students from applied sciences in relation to building their skills, for example, self-esteem (Price, 2002). An example of a study relevant to our chapter is conducted by Tovey (2001) who focuses on the positive effects of work life socialization, professionalism, and motivation through experiential learning. In addition, Tindowen et al. (2019) focused on how students developed both hard and soft skills through internships. Benneworth and Fitjar (2019) underline that universities contribute to regional development through graduate employment, the collaboration between university and industry, in addition to policymaking and impacting the RIS. Arguably, regional engagement is not an isolated task but rather interlinked with research and teaching activities at universities. The skills of the graduate may not always match the demands in the region, and therefore the collaboration and communication between the recipient and the supplier of professional knowledge are crucial so that the best match can be obtained.

Less attention has been given to academic fields that do not have a long tradition for internships. We, therefore, aim to fill this gap by studying how the selected academic fields and the regional actors are handling internships to meet regional needs, while simultaneously focusing on educational development. With this background, we are posing the overall research question: *How do internships contribute to educational and regional development from the perspectives of HEIs and regional actors?*

In the continuation of this chapter, we first give a brief presentation of HEIs in Norway. We thereafter elaborate on our theoretical framework and present design and methodological aspects. The findings of our study are presented separately and thereafter discussed in relation to the theoretical framework in the last concluding section. Avenues for further development and research are suggested.

The Norwegian Higher Educational Landscape

The study in this chapter was conducted at a regional university college in Norway. The Norwegian educational landscape is dominated by public providers at all levels, and there has been a political drive to strengthen access to higher education in regions with educational systems that date back to the 1950s (Pinheiro et al., 2016). A dual system of centralized universities and regional district colleges was established. This system provided central education to the districts, such as nursing, teaching, public administration, economy, and all kinds of engineering. Following the development in the fields, education and institutions were developed through the 1970s. The dispersed model of organizing was costly and perceived as too fragmented. Reforms were enforced in the 1990s, establishing a binary system of universities and university colleges (Kyvik, 2002). In this process, 98 local colleges merged into 26 public university colleges, and a strong mandate to pursue regional development remains. An aspect underlining the importance of access to higher education across

geography and socio-economic layers is the funding of the sector. Education at public universities is free of tuition fees, and students are offered stipends and affordable loans for life support. This state stipend and loan arrangement (labelled Lånekassen) was established in 1947 and increased possibilities for students to pursue higher education, independently of the family income (Bjelle, 2019). In the last two decades, the focus has been on facilitating research, innovation, and development between all educational institutions and different regional stakeholders (Gythfeldt & Heggen, 2013). Based on the structural reform in 2015 (KD, 2014–2015), the HEI landscape once more was re-shaped by mergers. In 2017, the 33 HEIs were reduced to 21 by the establishment of multicampus systems and the gradual erosion of the college sector.

Theoretical Approach

To improve our understanding of the influence of internships as contributors to educational and regional development, we apply the analytical approach of placemaking. A straightforward way of understanding the concept is to perceive that all human beings create places to live from areas they find themselves (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995). Placemaking focuses on the processes between different actors to shape and develop the geographical area they are living in (Pierce et al., 2011). Based on this perspective, regional development relies on the interaction and co-creation between the actors involved (Brandsen et al., 2018). Regional actors can influence education through contact with HEI, and universities contribute to shaping the regions through teaching activities, research, and third-mission activities. We are narrowing our study to teaching-related activities through internships.

An internship is a learning activity that lasts for a limited period, where the student spends a short period and work on specific projects and tasks during the placement. This part of a study programme can be understood as a placemaking activity where different actors are involved in educating through the work placement activities. These forms of learning experience extend the understanding of involvement, where both actors from working life and university staff contribute to the learning outcome in different ways (Brooks & Youngson, 2016; Eraut, 2011; Jackson & Wilton, 2016). Based on the temporary character of this type of education, some students live at the place for a short time, while others stay for a longer period in the region. The footprint of student activities can shape local life, including the educational and leisure side. Students can be actors contributing to place-shaping, but their activities can also create connections between the HEIs and local actors. Over time, this can crystalize networks and systemic properties that can have a placemaking effect. The education of students also influences regional development by supplying professionals to the labour market. The place can be shaped by the networks evolving from the interactions between HEIs and local actors. The HEIs do not have any formal roles regarding the local organizations, but a collaboration through networks can shape microstructures that enable participant

socialization, influence decision-making, support information flow, create a shared identity, and develop solidarity among the participants (Pierce et al., 2011) within that specific regional setting.

Nonetheless, influencing education and educational content is not straightforward. Groups of students, such as nurses, teachers, and social workers, who have traditionally been learning their skills through practical training share strong professional characteristics (Abbott, 1988). They practise monopoly in their jobs, and educational content development is strongly regulated by both professional organizations and political frameworks. Following this, the influence for regional actors to prompt the curriculum and development of the professions is more limited. The academic fields we study are theoretically more open to influence from external actors as they are not regulated to the same degree by professional organizations or regulative frameworks. This gives an avenue for input from the regional actors.

Education such as business administration, sociology, and history is not so focused on learning practical skills. The learning outcomes are more abstract knowledge that must be interpreted and translated within the organization the academics are working. It makes an avenue for local internship placements to fill the practice with meaning and content that is in line with the needs of the organization or region. This gives an avenue for placemaking in relation to *locatedness* (of being *here*). Locatedness is iteratively created through different types of input (Pierce et al., 2011). This can be studied in relation to the following elements: political (e.g., what is to be prioritized regarding needs in the setting), social (e.g., what characterizes this particular location), and managerial input (can take many forms depending on the organizations or actors involved).

On the basis of this theoretical framework, we pose the following questions to guide our analysis:

1   *What characterizes the processes of developing internship programmes and what possible effects can be seen on placemaking in the region?*
2   *How can the development of education through internships benefit the region?*

Research Design and Methods

The data collection for this project has a comparative design (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) where we compared a case from the HEI and a regional case. We selected to perform our study in rural Norway, where placemaking through central institutions and students can be crucial to maintain the population and develop the region. In the selected region, the university has expanded their cooperation with both private and public sectors to develop the practical learning courses and trainee agreements within the new fields. The data are anonymized, safeguarding that the participants could speak freely.

Overall, we interviewed eight participants. Of which, four participants from the HEI case were strategically selected (Thagaard, 2018). We interviewed the programme coordinators from history, sociology, and business administration,

in addition to a dean responsible for internship programmes. History and sociology have only had internships for a year while the business administration has gradually built their internship programme the last decade, starting as an offering for students who were not able to take a semester abroad where internship programme was part of the course package. The numbers of internships were ranging from 15 to 40 students from the business administration (master students) and sociology (bachelor), while history had fewer than 10 internships a year (bachelor). The selection of regional partners was following a snowballing method (ibid.), where we contacted four partners from private and public sectors who had experience with internship students from these educational groups. The interview guide was structured to ease the comparisons between the cases. The first part of the guide contained questions related to the student groups and the specific workplace (e.g., type of students, how to build the network). The second part related to the collaboration between the actors, how to prepare for internships, how to follow up on students, how difficult situations were handled, feedback between the actors, and impact on keeping students in the region. The interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes through the Zoom digital platform.

Empirical Presentation

The presentation of our empirics is organized according to the two questions posed after presenting the theoretical approach. In question 1, we ask what characterizes the processes of developing the internship programmes and thereafter focusing on the effects of these programmes on the region.

When selecting organizations for their students, the business administration programme draws on previous experience. History and sociology were in the phase where they had to build a network of regional actors who were willing to receive students. This process was initiated by the programme coordinator, who e-mailed public and private actors with an invitation to participate in the internship programmes. Where to employ a historian or business administrator is perhaps more obvious than for sociology. The programme coordinator at sociology underscored that it was a bit challenging to establish an internship network for their students, simply because there was no understanding of this subject within the region. "*I had to explain what sociology is*". The organizations had difficulties seeing how they could contribute and make use of history and sociology students. The HEI actors therefore stressed that internships were venues where students could employ skills such as analysing according to theories and employing specific methods. Illustrated with a quote from the programme coordinator in history:

> *We are one of the most distant subjects in relation to the labour market, not educating a profession. This is what we emphasize; to show how our theoretical education can be translated into a practical professional life.*
>
> (Programme coordinator history)

The coordinators received good responses from municipal and private actors, but public actors at the state level were rather reluctant (despite the national push for such engagement within the public sector). To confirm the collaboration, the lecturers contacted the actors to explain, plan and clarify expectations. The establishing process was creative, helping to develop ideas of whom and how to invite participants. As an illustration of how a broad mindset is needed in this process, the programme coordinator from history continues narrating his reflection on the skills and interests of students as well as to find organizations to receive students:

> *Initially, I did not think of a sports club as the natural choice for a history student, but after thorough considerations, I realized the usefulness of studying this club. [As a Norwegian educational organization] we are obligated to facilitate internships for top athletes, so we came to an arrangement with the club regarding the division between training and internship tasks.*

> (Programme coordinator history)

This is an illustration of how a history student could develop her educational skills by studying the organization and combining it with a top athlete career. Table 12.1 offers examples of internship placements for the academic fields.

When the contacts were established, the regional partners received a description from the programme coordinators at the university explaining the expected learning outcome for the specific field. This was spacious enough for the regional actors to interpret and fill with relevant tasks. The regional partner likewise made a presentation of their organization and what they could offer the students. In addition, the students participated in this selection process by writing a CV presenting their qualifications, interests, and expectations. The business administration had developed this into a more competitive process where students applied for positions, and the regional actors had to promote their internship project as attractive. Some actor from the private sector was a bit worried for the competitive match-making process where the HEI had supervision over the engagement process. They worried that students would

Table 12.1 Examples of regional internship placements

Sociology	History	Business administration
County administration	Museum	Private businesses
Regional development centre	Archive	Oil industry
Public and private schools	Sports club	Aquaculture
NGO's		Construction
Engineering companies		Media
Newspaper		Start-ups
Sports club		Clusters
Refugee centre		Hospital
Child protection service		Municipality

prefer other projects. Nonetheless, in the end, the programme coordinators decided on where the students were assigned and safeguarded the communication process with the external companies.

To ensure the quality of the internship, both students and regional actors were followed up through the internship programme by the HEI staff. For sociology and history, safeguarding the output was challenging because they lack a tradition of training students to translate their academic expertise into practical work.

The communication between the HEI, regional actors, and students was crucial to ensure a meaningful internship period for both the students and the participating organizations. The most successful students had made a structured plan on what they were going to focus on during their internships.

To receive this type of student programmes also challenged the regional actors. They had to build systems for receiving students, who should be the contact person to the HEI, and how to delegate the practical daily contact with the students. In dialog with the educators, the organizations appointed mentors with responsibilities to follow up on the students – aiming at ensuring the learning outcome and safeguarding the educational contributions for the students. This required both time and resources for the participating organizations.

> *I have to say, just to sum up . . . we find it very positive to have students, but it is demanding. Time and resources. But it is nice to get younger people in . . . to plan for families and children, teach them bake potato cakes, slaughter a pig . . . so they are getting insight in a variety of museum tasks.*
>
> (Museum contact)

This quote illustrates how history students had hands-on experiences in developing a teaching programme for families and children regarding one specific historic time.

Placemaking is not necessarily straightforward; it deals with how to address problematic situations. As the internship programmes were quite new, few serious hurdles were mentioned when we asked how the programme coordinators and the regional actors were handling problematic situations. Irrespectively, in the process of building a network and choosing partners that were suitable to participate in educating students through internships, the programme coordinators had to balance the expectations from the regional actors. Some of them were concerned with "*what's in it for me?*" They desired specific tasks, analysis, or specific reports from the students. This could conflict with the intention of the internship programme. Therefore, the university actors had to clarify and use the time to communicate the programme intentions to the collaborating regional actors. The programme coordinator from the business administration emphasized that they sometimes were "*afraid that students will be exploited as free labour. The students must have sensible tasks to perform and learn from*".

When problems occurred, it was feasible to talk with the actors involved to clarify misunderstandings and expectations. Simultaneously, some organizations turned out to be unsuitable for such teaching activities and were not invited to the next round. The dean emphasized that problems often occurred when the organizations did not give the student relevant tasks.

> *It is easy to distinguish between good and bad internship places. Ehm . . . if they offer tasks that, in many ways, do not have priority within the organization, the students are often dissatisfied with the internship and learning output. At once the tasks are closer to core tasks of the organization, things that matter, is important, then the internship "goes by itself".*
>
> (Dean)

Furthermore, the dean emphasizes that the new programmes have a long way to go to co-create new types of educational programmes and to prepare external organizations to participate in education. The mentors from participating companies teach the students both specific tasks and practical skills, but they also had a responsibility to teach soft skills and socializing with the student, including adjusting students to the demands and norms within the working environment. The students had more theoretical training and influenced how well (or not) the students were prepared for handling real-life working situations. One of the mentors from the public sector addressed a problematic situation with the students. They managed to solve the issue and did not feel the need to contact the programme coordinator. In more difficult situations, the programme coordinators often had a mediator role, as they had to both guide students and balance the expectation of the regional actors.

To address placemaking through locatedness, we focused on what happened concerning the content of the work during internships. We pose the following question: *How can the development of education through internships benefit the region?*

In line with the statement of the dean, success stories were related to core tasks of the organizations. One of the participants from the private sector stated that their internship student was asked to analyse possibilities regarding application for funding for a new project. The student led and played a prominent role in developing the proposal that resulted in the successful allocation of funds.

> *We would not have been able to start working with this project so early if the internship student and the mentor had not identified the usefulness of that project. Especially the effort from the student who contributed to the proposal.*
>
> (Private company actor)

Other times, the students were working on specific projects (alone or collaborated with employees) where they were elaborating their field of knowledge, or the regional actors could influence the learning for the students.

The participants from HE also gave a few other examples of how the experiences with internships influenced both the quality and content of

education to meet regional needs. History bachelor received feedback regarding communication; the students had to develop their writing skills in a more popularized manner to be able to communicate to a larger societal audience, which contributed to enhancing the quality of their education. Another aspect was input on the order of when subjects were taught. For example, the coordinator for business administration realized that the students had to learn methods earlier to be able to reflect, discuss, and write their papers and exams but also to include multidisciplinary subjects regarding innovation or digitalization. For sociology, the coordinator realized that a new avenue for teaching was social entrepreneurship and youth gaming. It was also obvious that the internships became an eye-opener for students, reflected in the selection of themes for their bachelor thesis. Here illustrated with a quote from the programme coordinator in sociology:

> *For the first time, the students are showing an expanded focus for the bachelor thesis. Earlier I felt they were only writing about social media.*
>
> (Programme coordinator, sociology)

Regarding research, students learned and experienced academic development that they could also integrate into their bachelor and master thesis projects and were gaining a learning outcome that is highly relevant for the region. Students have an independent opportunity to influence their agenda and development. The internship programme also offered an avenue for research collaborations. Collaborating organizations often had ideas for research but did not have the research competencies and therefore welcomed these networks. Here students could participate through their projects, but the organizations also got connections to researchers within their fields at the HEI and the network that evolved through the internship programme.

One arena for "giving back" to society and share knowledge was seminars arranged in cooperation between the programme coordinator, students, and regional actors. Students were presenting projects from the internship period, but also projects developed in collaboration between the student and mentor. The faculty at the HEI contributed by presenting the latest research within specific fields and as such also influenced the development of the region in the communication with the internship organizations and the network. Presentations from regional actors were also a remedy to enlighten students and lecturers on what is going on in their fields.

Through the interviews with the regional actors (both private and public), it seemed like they were not aware of their possibility to influence curriculum within the master or bachelor programme. They were rather surprised that this was an option. Two of the interviewed highlighted that they did not want to interfere and trusted that the HEI had the competencies to provide education of good quality. The last one said: *I kind of do not think that conversation has been initiated [from the HEI]* (private company actor).

Lastly, one important function of the internships was to show the employability of the education. The connection between HEI and the region has been elaborated vastly just by introducing such an internship programme and provided the HEIs with a whole new avenue for collecting information on the relevance of their education. However, there is a task to elaborate the view of students and local actors on how the different educational types can be utilized.

The regional actors also realized the importance of internships for them. It became an avenue to show students the broad aspect of jobs they could provide in different villages and small towns in the districts. The organizations could also recruit good candidates for temporary jobs and had recruited for permanent positions among the students. One of the private actors emphasized that the internships were a nice method to recruit talented people:

> *Clearly, it is difficult to recruit competent people – and especially when you are a start-up company with limited resources. We must convince talented students to work here, therefor the internship period was nice.*
>
> (Private company actor)

Both the public and private regional actors were emphasizing their social responsibility to contribute to education, and an actor from a company with good student reputation said:

> *It is valuable for students and future employees that they have had an internship period and we can contribute to build career for the students. They sort of get a stamp; "okay, you have worked here" – and that can help them pursuing job opportunities later.*
>
> (Private company actor)

Discussion and Conclusion

A crucial aspect of place-shaping is the people; depopulation, brain drain, and stagnation can be a threat to the development of places, and Norway has had an HEI policy that has been focusing on regions since the 1950s (Pinheiro et al., 2016). The focus of this chapter was to get a deeper understanding of how HEI through student internships can contribute to meet regional needs and, in that way, participate in placemaking and regional development.

Central to the approach of placemaking is how human beings participate in creating places to live from areas they find themselves (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995). The main finding of our study is that the connection between HE and regional actors has been vastly elaborated by the introduction of internships. It gives a venue where HEI actors and students can make a footprint in the development of the regions. In addition, the regional actors can participate in the development of education. Some of the local organizations highlighted that all partners during the internship process can contribute to a focus on regional needs and even establish long-term contact for further research

projects between the HEIs and participating companies. Such initiatives are also in line with the regional policy for Norway where the emphasis recently has also been on developing such cooperations (Gythfeldt & Heggen, 2013).

The internship programmes are rather new, and the collaboration is in progress. Therefore, the regional actors might not be aware of their role as contributors to education and their possibility to influence the educational content of the curriculum and methods. Another way of viewing this is in the light of jurisdictions (Abbott, 1988). Even if the subjects and disciplines included in this case do not have strong professionalized characteristics regarding specific practical skills, the reluctance of giving input could be interpreted as a lack of knowledge of other academic fields. It could also be interpreted as a wish to respect the responsibility of the university.

The sense of locatedness is central in placemaking (Pierce et al., 2011). The data suggest that the focus on local characteristics was more prominent in the private rather than the public sector. The central task for HEIs has been to provide education to serve the need in the regions, especially to serve a strong public sector. Our findings are in line with the characteristic features of education and how open they are to become influenced by external stakeholders. Education aimed towards teaching children, treating people with illnesses, and assisting unemployed or elderly people are standardized across the country. These services are of a more general character, regulated by professional standards and therefore less due to local characteristics. This also implies that the sectors are embedded in the broader national context of political guidelines for prioritization in addition to the larger professional context. The private sector however is more coloured by regional features, of being *here* with the natural resources that characterize the specific geographical areas, as fishery and technology in relation to the oil industry. These industries are again embedded in the global market by offering high-quality and specialized products and services.

The programme coordinators were striving to get internships in the regions instead of supporting students to go back to their home regions to do the internship. This could be attributed to the fact that local internships are more practical (to be able to follow up on students and regional actors) and financially efficient (no extra costs for the HEI), but it could also be viewed as a political process (Pierce et al., 2011) and an instrument to serve the surroundings as one of the missions for regional educational institutions (Benneworth & Fitjar, 2019). Regarding power structures, Pierce et al. (2011) show that powerful actors not necessarily are the most visible ones. This can also be traced in our material. In large organizations, the contact between HEIs and regional actors was centralized to the manager higher in the organization. The managers then distributed the contact to select mentors who are responsible for the students. These mentors were the more visible contacts during the internship period. Thereby, the manager frames where the development could happen (or not), but the mentors also have the power to influence the development (or lack of development) according to the projects the students worked on, whom to meet, and what processes to participate in.

In addition, the regional actors needed to elaborate on their views regarding how to collaborate with new academic fields. Here the programme coordinators at the universities had a crucial task to work as translators and give examples of how sociologists, for example, could contribute to private businesses or managerial teams in a large public office. The internship programme appeared to have some influence on employability within the region. Signs supporting the employability hypothesis were that students were offered summer jobs at the workplace or opportunity after graduating, especially within businesses where such expertise was new.

The footprint of students in the regions can be both temporary and more stable. Many students stay in the region for only the educational period, but the tendency in Norway is that students stay in the area where they are educated (Gythfeldt & Heggen, 2013). Nonetheless, even students staying temporarily contribute to placemaking through the networks they participate in during studies, leisure and internships. Some students had a direct impact on what kind of partners were contacted to establish the internships, due to their specific interests and talents. In addition, students developed ideas of what themes to elaborate on through teaching and as research areas for their thesis. In this way, students directly influenced the network between the HEI and the region.

Another aspect of locatedness is to fill practice with meaning (Pierce et al., 2011). This was a bit challenging for the regional actors, but they were receiving guidance from the written framework the course coordinators had developed and communicated to the partners. The frames provided leeway to fill with meaningful tasks. The networks that evolve between the institutions are also an avenue for influencing through new microstructures (ibid.). Such networks are not limited to the new contacts between HEI and regional actors but also have the potential to develop across the region through the seminars where local partners, academics, and students presented their projects they have been working on during the internship.

Our study suggests that it is demanding to establish new internship programmes, but it simultaneously provides new avenues for HEI to contribute to regional development, and the employability of history, sociology, and business administration is broadened (Brooks & Youngson, 2016). Thereby, the HEIs have elaborated their role as placemakers. In addition, the learning platform for students will be enriched when applying learning by doing and meeting stakeholders from the fields where they potentially can be employed. The input is conversely more underdeveloped, as few of the regional actors suggested improvement to the specific education and the learning outcome. Lastly, the introduction of internships for new academic fields supports the idea of maintaining the population, where students participate to develop the regions.

The understanding of the role of internship as a contributor to educational and regional development is intertwined as all parts influence each other to a certain degree. This knowledge is important to both HEI and regional actors

who can gain input into their mundane activities. It can provide an avenue to receive input from a broader range of academics and can spur development within organizations as new theoretical and methodological angles can be introduced.

Nonetheless, there are additional questions that need follow-up. The participants in the study had responsibilities regarding the new internship regimes and were all (naturally) very positive about this form of educating students. This study has some limitations. An avenue for further research is to include the following critical aspects: What are we losing by reducing the amount of theoretical education? How do we handle input for new themes if receiving many suggestions, and how will the impact of practice influence the research–based foundation of these education? Teaching and nursing students are prepared with rehearsals and practical skills before entering their internships; therefore, they are not "blank" when stepping into the fields. How well are the students in our study prepared, and is it possible to prepare them? How does this influence their self-efficacy and ability to learn? These questions should be followed up.

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