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## **The Professional Societal Academic Network (PSAN) of Tourism Department Partners**

**– A Swedish Case Study Triangulated with the EU-Project TARSI**

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*Universities are not isolated from society.* Throughout the world and at the highest political level, there are pressures on the higher education sector to network with its surrounding society. This whole idea of networking is supported by the European Bologna process in connecting academia more closely with business and society and in new and innovative ways. Nevertheless, at universities there is a lack of knowledge on how to structure societal networks and a lack of experiences in network building. This causes problems with regard to effective co-operation between the university and its societal partners. The fact that universities are not isolated from society can also be recognised by the public debates on education, research and community engagement. Nevertheless, there are almost no research articles written about universities' societal networks.

*The purpose* of this research is to investigate university networks critically and to develop an analysis model for strategic partner relations and the underlying network structure within a Tourism Department's network.

*A case study methodology* has been used with the Tourism Department at the author's university being the object studied, in order to study the network building process since it was established in 1999. Experiences from the EU-project TARSI (Tailored Applied Research and Implementation) have been triangulated with the results from the case study.

Furthermore, a *literature review* has been conducted in order to identify which stakeholders appear in the literature of higher education-society interrelations and to find underlying dimensions to the university network structure. The *theoretical framework* is based on network theories, where network strategy, network partners, relation purpose,

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networks' formality, individual and organisational networks, network principles and obstacles are important themes.

For the Tourism Department, the following *strategic partner* types with associated relation purposes have been identified: the academic staff, current students, alumni, the tourism industry, public tourist organisations, non-profit tourist organisations, macro-environment partners and the higher education sector. Every main stakeholder group has been organised into partner groups at the Tourism Department. The benefit of this approach is that special university objectives can be reached more easily if the Tourism Department has known partners in formal sub-groups already in place. In every sub-group there are typically questions depending on the Department's relation purpose.

A *relation structure network model* has been developed, where the dimensions of formal-informal and organisational-individual have been found relevant in order to structure the network. The model is based on the four main opportunity building principles of permanency, openness, motivation and trustfulness. However, there are also corresponding main obstacles of cost-benefit misunderstanding, relation burden, strategic unconformity and non-network opportunities.

There is a challenge in *increasing the community engagement* activities when using more resources. However, the benefits for the university and the surrounding world will be positive in total. It is of great importance for European university academies to use network strategies in their overall planning in order to be a natural part of society, which is summarised as the *Professional Societal Academic Network (PSAN)*. Finally, the interaction of universities with society is regarded as a never-ending journey in a global world.

**KEYWORDS:** Strategic network, Tourism Department, Community engagement, Network partners, Networks' formality, Individual-organisational stakeholders