

## **Small is beautiful - also in a globalized world** (translated from an article in the Danish newspaper Politiken from January 24, 2010)

By Mads Tofte, Vice chancellor and Jørgen Staunstrup, Provost - IT University of Copenhagen

A quiet Thursday morning in November 2009, a student from the IT University is at Niels Brock's Business College talking to their China-class about his collaboration with a talented student from Peking University in China. He talks about a new mobile phone service the two students have developed for Copenhagen Airport. One may wonder why a business college in Copenhagen has a China-class, and why do students from the IT University collaborate with students from China?

We believe this is because globalization is also picking up momentum also among universities. The world (including the university world) is not the same as it was yesterday. Today almost all aspects of our economy and social life is greatly influenced by globalization, and it is no longer enough to have a solid home market, read and write your own language or be the best in Denmark. The challenges and possibilities offered by globalizations are among the most important for Denmark. Our prosperity is heavily dependent on Denmark's ability to develop services and products with a high content of advanced knowledge that can be sold worldwide and justify the high prices and wages in Denmark. Denmark cannot do this in isolation, but is heavily dependent on attracting the best international knowledge and to train graduates (at all levels from undergraduate to PhD) who can match the best in the world. This is also why the Danish government has an ambitious *globalization plan* which includes a significant investment in Danish universities.

If Denmark fails to develop knowledge that will be sought throughout the world, we cannot maintain our competitiveness which is as a prerequisite for our prosperity. If we do not have education and research that can match the best in the world, there will be no need for our graduates and researchers. Examples of such knowledge are: Danish windmills, software and agricultural products. These match the best competitors in the world, and therefore, they are interesting and valuable. In contrast, for example, Jolly Cola (Danish coke imitation) or Danish wine which is not interesting on an international scale. It is a bit like comparing Caroline Wozniacki (top 5 in womens tennis) with a Danish bobsledge team. It is the global scale, which defines the standard.

### **Getting most out of our resources**

It is obviously important that all Danish universities are working to develop our core competences that are competitive globally, but it is equally important that we develop our capacity to use other organizations' core competences. Combining our own and others' competences to offer students, surrounding community and staff access to knowledge at the highest level: the best processes, the most developed education and the best communication. We must have a maximal return on the resources we spend on education and research. Research is about creating new knowledge, and it is usually done through a complex work process with many

steps. Like other processes, this process may be improved significantly by performing some of the steps in other parts of the world where they are better or faster or cheaper or otherwise better than us. Therefore, we must be attractive to the best brains in the world in the research and education areas that Denmark decides to focus on, and we must develop our abilities to work globally.

While Denmark cannot - and should not - assert itself in all areas. Specialization is the source of economic development. Thomas Friedman's thought-provoking book, "The World Is Flat", has many fine examples of this. Among Friedman's many good points is that the competitiveness of today is not about size, but about cutting-edge, i.e. whether one can offer something of value in a global market. That "something" can be physical products, knowledge and services and it can be very specialized. Is there something that is of value seen from a global perspective, you are appreciated; however, the size of your organization is irrelevant. Friedman's observations on a flat world also apply to universities. Researchers with cutting-edge results are in demand throughout the world, regardless of the size of the organization (or country), they come from. Future students will also require access to the best, newest, most relevant and best-mediated knowledge they can access. For them it will mean less where this knowledge comes from. A small partner can contribute something of value throughout the world.

It seems a paradox that we must both be better to collaborate with other specialties, and also work deeper within our own specialty. Nobody can find all the core competences within their own organization, not even the largest organizations. In Denmark, we cannot even expect to find them within the country. Therefore, all the educational programs at the IT-University are now developed in collaboration with global partners. Meanwhile, research at the IT University is also moving towards global collaboration.

### **Future global university**

At the IT University we imagine a future where education consists of an organized collection of educational elements, each of which have very different degrees of globalization. At one end of the spectrum will remain study activities where all students and teachers involved are Danish, speaks Danish and are physically present at the IT University. At the other end of the spectrum, there will be study activities where a group of students enrolled at various universities working together in globally interactively using the Internet, under the guidance of teachers who are employed at various universities in different countries.

On the research front, the focus should not be to attract as many researchers as possible, but instead to attract the right ones. At the same time, we must foster research that creates direct value for Denmark, even if most of it is done abroad.

It is our hope that the political process started on revising the Danish University Act based on the evaluation of the Danish universities will focus on how to ensure that Danish universities become valued partners in the best

international networks. In this context, the internal competition between the Danish universities is less significant. It can at best, as in sport, be considered warming up. Danish companies have long recognized that if they want success, there is no point being the market leader in Denmark. It avails nothing to put all its activities within its borders. If they want to survive in a globalized world, they must master the art of combining Danish core competences with the best from the rest of the world. By having the right teams that deliver world-class, we can make it- even if you come from a small country or a small organization.