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**Author**

KARLSEN, James

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**Abstract**

Policy makers' interest in higher education institutions (HEIs) as instruments for regional development has increased in recent years, but evidence on the role of HEIs in peripheral regions remains unclear. In this article, we focus on the actual practices of HEIs in such regions. Specifically, we combine theories on the roles of HEIs and regional leadership in a case study of four HEIs (two in the Czech Republic and two in Norway) and their engagement in the development of their host regions. Our analysis shows that the HEIs engage in their host regions through their primary mission of teaching. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)