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**Abstract**

Despite new empirical insights on the topic, the role of the universities in regional development is far from clear. Some regions with strong universities manage to benefit from technological spillovers, while others fail to develop strong industry–university connections, which leaves the research potential of the university largely unutilized. This paper investigates the role played by universities in the development of industrial clusters in two peripheral regions in Norway and the Czech Republic. In so doing, we contrast between a more and a less successful case scenario shedding light on key contextual factors, including the importance attributed to top-down versus bottom-up approaches. The paper contributes with new empirical insights on the role of higher education institutions in regional cluster development. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)