

# Talking about Kennispark: understanding expat campus stories to explore global science spaces' symbolic attractiveness for highly skilled migrants.

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## **1. Introduction**

There is increasing interest in the way that international highly skilled knowledge migrants (expats) begin to identify with place-specific characteristics of particular regions, and how these global citizens acquire particular connections and entanglements in particular localities, creating spill-over effects that drive innovation-based regional economic development. Part of the debate has been tied up with Richard Florida's (2002) idea of creative classes, with an implicit understanding that these workers have a predominantly cosmopolitan identity that is attached to particular lifestyles and professional interests that are best exercised in urban locations rather than necessarily being tied to particular places. When considering how global science spaces (GSSs) can offer assets and facilities to attract expats, there is a tendency to think of this in purely economic terms (e.g. career development and job opportunities). However this makes it hard to understand the popularity of the rise of the GSSs if all these places offer is a kind of specialised suburban estate (Forsyth & Crewe, 2010) for existing high-technology opportunities. If what attracts expats is the particular atmosphere and cosmopolitanism of place, how can GSSs attract expats beyond the employment and career opportunities they offer? Additionally, if expats are attracted to a simple atmosphere of particular spaces, how can people deliberately create physical spaces that attract and retain these knowledge migrants?

Using a single-case study of the Dutch *Kennispark Twente* (eng. Knowledge Park), this paper poses two overarching research questions:

- 1 How do those creating science parks try to establish local environments that attract expats?
- 2 How are these efforts and outcomes perceived by expats?

## **2. The multilevel role of Global Science Spaces**

The starting point of this research is to argue that insufficient attention has been paid to the multilevel role of GSSs in urban science literature. As argued by Phan, Siegel and Wright (2005), thinking in purely economic-functional terms, the original mission of GSSs is business acceleration and the production of applied research of excellent quality (Lazzaretti & Tavoletti, 2007) through knowledge agglomeration and resource sharing. By introducing the concept of functional urban areas (FUAs), the OECD Committee for Territorial Development Policy stresses the importance of cities and urban science projects, such as GSSs, as generators of wealth, employment and productivity, which not only became key players of transnational flows, but also act as essential spatial nodes in the national and global economy (OECD, 2014, p.46).

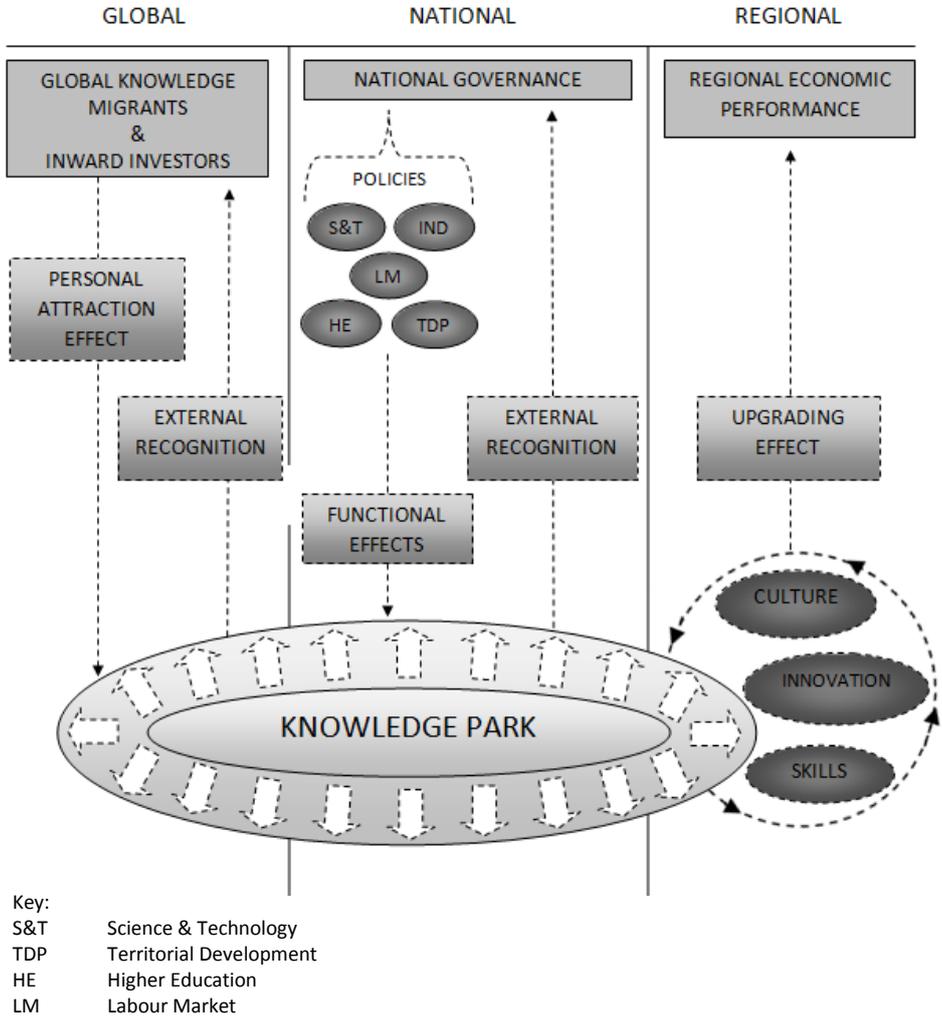
According to Phan, et al. (2005), GSSs can also aim to foster regional development and growth, thereby exerting a regional upgrading effect. Due to the changing role of universities in recent society (Van den Kroonenberg, 1996), which increasingly become under pressure to open themselves up to the outside world and to function as corporate bodies, an increasing amount of universities got involved in the establishment of GSSs through the creation of start-up firms based on university-owned technology (Phan, et al., 2005, p. 13). Korotka (2005) argues that this university-industry linkages would support regional growth, since it enhances regional innovation through the promotion of enterprises, business development and growth through the accumulation and transfer of knowledge to the industry (p.415). Furthermore, it is argued by Van den Kroonenberg (1996) that universities involved in GSSs would have next to their social function, the production and teaching of applied research of excellent quality, a regional function, which implies that they are expected to have a positive external spillover effect on the regional development that is recognized by national policy makers and businesses (p.16).

Next to their purely economic role, GSSs can also function as social spaces, where particular imagined communities act and interact to achieve desirable goals (Anderson, 1991). Consequently, a GSS creators and managers can also aim to attract and retain knowledge

migrants purely on their personal affection towards a specific space that is characterised, for example, by its identikit, tasteful, landscaped campus[...] (Gallent et al., 2006, p.40). These identikit places, simultaneously providing an infrastructure for living, learning and recovering, can also be seen as ‘non-place’ located in specialized suburban states that ‘cannot be defined as relational, or historical or concerned with identity’ (Augé, 2008, p.78).

Based on the discussion above, an analytic framework is developed (see Fig. 1). It summarises the multi-level role of a GSS and its external engagement with its regional, national, and global environment, thereby highlighting four dimensions of operational effects: [1] functional effect (effort of regional and national actors to create a nice and attractive place) [2] regional upgrading effect (acquired outcomes leading to a new culture and skills aiming to enhance regional innovation), [3] external recognition (effort and outcomes recognized by global knowledge migrants and inward investors), and [4] personal attraction affection (external “force” that attracts migrants).

**Figure 1.** Multilevel role of GSSs.  
Source: Based on OECD, 2007.



### **3. Background of the ‘Kennispark Twente’ case study & method**

The Kennispark Twente is located in the Dutch Twente region, close to the German border (see Figure 2) (Mora, Detmer & Vieira, 2010). Since the region heavily suffered from the demise of the textile industry during the 1960s, the University of Twente (UT) was established in 1961 as an attempt to revive the region economically. Subsequently, among its profile as an “Entrepreneurial University”, the UT established, supported and funded public-private partnerships that were characterized by tight cooperation between business communities and leading knowledge institutes in the Twente region (Mora, et al., 2010). During the 1970s, the UT’s active engagement with the regional industry, regional policy makers, municipalities, and regional and national actors, led finally to the creation of the Kennispark Twente, merging the earlier established Business and Science Park with the University campus (Benneworth & Ratinho, 2011). Nowadays, more than 700 spin-off firms are rooted in the UT and it therefore belongs to one of the most entrepreneurial universities in the Netherlands and Europe. A study of Karnebeek (2001) showed that spin-offs became an important role not only for the Kennispark, but also for the Twente region. Whereas 23% of all knowledge-intensive companies, fostered by the UT, have offices in the Kennispark (either on the UT campus or at the Business and Science park), 78% of the spin-off companies are based in the Twente region, thereby fostering regional development and growth (Karnebeek, 2001, p. 5).

This exploratory case study reports field research on expats in the development of localised knowledge pools and their influence on innovation-based regional economic development. The aim of this study is to identify key themes for a future quantitative research which will be undertaken in the course of 2016-17. As one of the five founding fathers of the Kennispark Twente, the UT is chosen as the unit of analysis, since it is deeply integrated in the strategic decision making and development of the Kennispark Twente. A narrative analysis technique, looking at the stories of the creators of the Kennispark as well as expats, is used to derive the elements of the underlying symbolic attraction of the science space. The first fieldwork element involved a review of literature exploring how GSSs can strategically create local environments and places that increases their external attractiveness and recognition by expats.

**Figure 2.** The Twente region.  
Source: ITC, University of Twente, Enschede.



This was complemented by two series of semi-structured face-to-face interviews, first focusing on how and why national and regional decision makers, academics, architects, and business partners tried to create a local environment that attracts expats, and second, exploring how these efforts and outcomes of these ‘creators’ were perceived by the expats. Initial interviews were approached after a consultation with the supervisor of the author who published extensionally about this topic. Further interviewees were approached using a snowball technique. Since a narrative analysis technique was used that focuses mainly on ‘story telling’, each questionnaire was tailored to the questioned interviewee. Each questionnaire consisted of five items, including an invitation message introducing the study and fourteen questions. In total fifteen interviews were conducted, nine with local ‘creators’ and six with expats.

## 4. Empirical evidence

In the following section, empirical evidence is provided concerning the question how the University of Twente, thought its form and function, operates as a local place that aims to

attract global expats. Following my conceptual framework in Figure 1, I focus on two things: (a) the creators that attempted to establish an global attractive local environment, and (b) the expats personal perception towards these efforts and outcomes.

### Efforts and outcomes of the 'creators'

Creators' of the Kennispark Twente focused in their efforts to establish a global attractive local environment on a step-by-step plan including four elements: (1) the creation of a campus university (2) the creation of a high value infrastructure (3) the creation of a symbolic profile, and (4) ways to acquire external recognition.

Firstly was the stewardship of the campus environment: As the only campus university in the Netherlands, the UT was unique in 1960s and 1970s, since architects aimed to establish a self-containing island, where students and teachers could live, work/study and rehabilitate together. Next to its regional role, creators of the UT felt a social responsibility for creative beauty to the benefit of students and staff members. Based on this, architects and creators established an unique campus architecture that not only provides space for cultural activities, but also artifacts that emit a sense of warmth to the residents and visitors of the Campus.

In order to use this applied research of excellent quality for business acceleration, projects, such as the Gallery project, creators of the UT aimed to integrate the university-industry linkage through the conversion of existing university facilities (such as former university laboratories), BSP facilities and new facilities into a business centre (the Gallery project) located on the university campus. In addition, architects attempted to align the campus architecture with a virtual space-architecture (e.g. O&O plein, HogeKamp building) to bind people to specific places and lead them around the Campus unselfconsciously. Furthermore, this virtual space-architecture aimed to encourage interpersonal interaction and knowledge exchange between both sides of the Kennispark.

In order to entice an attractive space for global talents through more differentiation using specialisation, the Kennispark Twente created a unique profile as a hotspot for regional innovation focusing on tight relationships between the UT and businesses allocated in the BSP. With more the 700 spin-off firms that created more than 3,134 new job opportunities in the region, the UT was declared by the Elsevier magazine in 2013 as to be the 'most entrepreneurial

university' and therefore officially ranks among the most entrepreneurial universities in the Netherlands and Europe.

To encourage its external recognition by the national government and business, the creators of the Kennispark Twente aimed to integrate the university campus into the 'internet of things'. Furthermore, through the invitation of important and well known personalities, such as the Dutch king Willem-Alexander, the Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte, and the Dutch European Commissioner for Digital Agenda Neelie Kroes, the University of Twente aimed to gain national as well as international recognition.

### Reaction of knowledge migrants to these efforts and outcomes

In the following it is reported how expats perceived these efforts and outcomes undertaken by the creators of the Kennispark focusing on the same four elements as in the previous section.

The unique Campus architecture with its different buildings, green areas and artifacts is appreciated by expats as an oasis that provides a pleasant and recovering working environment. However, as it was highlighted by some expats, this oasis effect would also involve disadvantages, which is the lack of a metropolitan and multicultural buzz. Expats therefore would perceive a picture of individual internationalism lacking a multicultural international dimension.

The UT with its specialized research institutes (e.g. MESA+ and MIRA) is perceived by expats as an unique place providing the opportunity to gather experiences in applied science in specific research areas. But the Kennispark as a whole, especially the part where the business units are located stays rather unrecognised by the migrants, because of the absence of a clear linkage (boulevard or line) between the University campus and the business park.

Being a small, rather unknown local place, expats perceive the Kennispark Twente as a space that encourages young entrepreneurship. In addition, campus residents, including knowledge migrants sense themselves as part of an 'imagined communities' with an entrepreneurial configuration and spirit that is encouraged through everyday face-to-face interaction as well as knowledge exchange. However, the lack of knowledge about one's own potentialities is perceived by some expats as a double-edged since it not only evokes enthusiasm but also frustration.

The Kennispark Twente is often not recognized by expats either at a global or local scale, however unfolds its attraction through its actual experience. It is therefore often perceived as a 'rabbit hole' by expats, which is hidden, yet, unfolds a variety of formerly unknown possible and imaginary opportunities that can be used as a competitive advantage by young foreign entrepreneurs.

## **5. Analysis**

As the empirical evidence shows creators of the University of Twente succeeded in the creation of a place (University campus) which functions as a place of interaction, where people continuously try to interact with each other to exchange their knowledge. Although the migrants value the unique infrastructure of the campus, which is characterized by its dipartite functional structure and its beauty, creators failed to establish an international and multicultural atmosphere that attracts the global elite. But an imagined community is sensed by expats, characterized by an entrepreneurial spirit, albeit refer to it as a double-edged place that often restrains new opportunities. Nevertheless, creators' aims to obtain a regional upgrading effect, boosting regional innovation, succeeded since expats experience the attraction of the place with its high-tech configuration through its actual experience. However, although expats sensed the spatial imaginary entrepreneurial possibilities at the Kennispark Twente, not enough evidence is provided about the question yet whether this imagined community with an unique entrepreneurial spirit does actually bind them to a specific place. This questions whether creators efforts to enhance the external recognition of the Kennispark Twente entirely succeeded, since its presence is often perceived as a 'rabbit hole' rather than a high-tech factory, lacking a multicultural international dimension, thereby providing an attractive environment only to a specific variety of people.

## **6. Conclusion**

Using a single-case study of the Kennispark Twente, I investigated the multilevel role of GSSs in attracting expats. I investigated four operational effects, starting from creators' efforts to establish a specific place with an valued infrastructure and an unique cultural spirit, to a global space that is recognised by expats (see Figure 1). In order to measure whether the creators succeeded in their efforts and outcomes to establish a local environment that attracts expats,

I compared and examined the correspondence of two sets of perceptions (those of the creators and those of the expats).

As the analysis shows creators of the University of Twente partly succeeded in their efforts to establish an unique University campus that attracts expats. Whereas the University succeeded to establish a symbolic space, characterized by a entrepreneurial spirit hold by and imagined community, the University failed to attract expats at a global and national level, since the rather unknown local place (rabbit hole) only seems to unfolds its local attraction for migrants though its actual experience. But a clear answer to the question whether this imagined community with its unique entrepreneurial spirit is sufficient to bind expats to a specific place stays left open, since more empirical evidence needs to be collected investigating factors that attracts and binds expats to specific places.

The contribution of this case study to the urban science literature is twofold: firstly, my preliminary results show that more attention needs to be paid to the multilevel role of GSSs in urban science literature, since places seem to attract people not purely based on an economical dimension but also on a social dimension, imagined community. Secondly, if it is a particular atmosphere and cosmopolitanism of a specific place that attracts expats, researchers and policy-maker should think more carefully about other ways, including psychological effects, that can explain factors that bind people to specific places.

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