

Community and Regional Development Models Lessons for Ballarat from Jyväskylä, Finland

Jyväskylä is a city of about 130,000, and is the main city in the province of Central Finland. It provides some models for how similar cities and regions in Australia (such as Ballarat and Central Victoria) could capitalise on their geographical location, their manufacturing or intellectual base, or how by exploiting other niches they might gain some significant economic benefits.

The city has a number of similarities to Ballarat, including its size, being a regional centre surrounded by a mix of farm land, forest and wilderness, and being the base of a significant collection of manufacturing, service and educational organisations. Both are centres of national historical and cultural significance.

Jyväskylä is about 3 hours north of Helsinki by the frequent fast train service, and enjoys fast connections to other regional centres in Finland by plane from a busy domestic airport, similar in size to that of Launceston. It has a symphony orchestra, a renowned annual music and cultural festival (now in its 56th year), and a strong identity as the hometown of the famous Finnish architect Alvar Aalto (and of many other architects. Architects, designers, educationalists and composers are highly regarded in Finland).

Its manufacturing is based on the forestry and metal industries – with forestry harvesting and log handling mechanical systems from companies including Nokka and Profi. These traditional areas of manufacturing strength are now joined increasingly by information and communication technology businesses. The Jyväskylä region is also a leader in Finland for both bioenergy production and ongoing research in bioenergy technology.

There are some significant differences in the way the two cities utilise their real advantages of size, location, intellectual assets and history. Jyväskylä city for instance has invested heavily in renewable energy, and with its large new biomass-fuelled combined heat and power (CHP) plant now on line can now claim to generate or provide 70% of the primary energy needs of the city municipality, plus export energy beyond its boundaries – all together more than any other city of comparable size in the world. This means that along with creation of many permanent jobs a large fraction of the money spent on energy is retained within the regional economy. The city also earns income from electricity exported into the national grid.

Jyväskylä not only is home for the University of Jyväskylä, but also the JAMK University of Applied Sciences, and a number of other notable organisations at secondary or polytechnic level. Apart from bioenergy, some areas that these institutions have prominence in or export in some way include particle research, education, sexual health education, and national and international level sports training at the Central Finland Sports Academy. Within the city is also the Craft School of Jyväskylä run by the Central Finland Crafts Association, and which teaches both children and adults. Jyväskylä University is the developer and majority shareholder in EduCluster Finland Ltd, which exports educational services to countries including Abu Dhabi, Russia, Saudi Arabia and other national education systems. Other minor owners of the EduCluster Ltd are JAMK University of Applied Sciences and Jyväskylä Educational Consortium.

The city has a number of important R&D institutions. One major section of VTT (Finland's science research organisation) is based at Jyväskylä. The particle accelerator at the University of Jyväskylä attracts physics researchers and PhD students from northern and central Europe. The city is also the homebase of the Finland Bioenergy Association (Finbio) and the BENET Bioenergy Network. Major forestry product and biofuel production companies with bases in central Finland include VAPO, Biowatti, Metso, UPM Kymmene, and M-Real.

As a natural extension of the extensive academic and research activity in the region, Jyväskylä has become one of Finland's leading cities for congresses and conferences. It has a new multiple-auditorium conference centre and an increasing number of hotel rooms. A new 170 room hotel with some conference facilities is presently being built beside the city convention centre. While conferences held by the University or JAMK are held in their own facilities, larger conferences and trade expos use the city's lakeside Paviljonki centre, which is large enough to cope easily with 600 people. The city, through its Conference Bureau, assists conference organisers cost and arrange conferences, and assists in organising accommodation and other services and entertainment. In 2010 congresses of various kinds attracted 3,300 participants and the tourism revenue generated by conferences, expos and conventions amounted to 5.4 million euros. In 2011 some notable conferences included the Nordic Bioenergy conference, the Building Trade and Home Renovation Fair, and Outdoor Fishing and Hunting 2011.

A city with this entrepreneurial, innovation and manufacturing activity will naturally attract many other businesses and organisations that see themselves as having some fit. So it is with Jyväskylä, where many smaller and larger service providers and technology start-ups have developed here or moved here to be involved in this energised city. An example is the business Mobile Care and Safety, which has developed mobile phone-based services enhancing personal safety. Harmonia Care is another business involved in producing and developing home care services and, for example, is involved in development of 'a smart floor' that can detect when an elderly care unit resident has fallen, and which then puts out a call for help.

Tying all this together are a number of organisations that work across the municipalities in the Jyväskylä region. These include the Regional Council of Jyväskylä, and JYKES - the Jyväskylä Regional Development Company. The region has set an ambitious target to cease import of fossil fuels used in power and heat production by 2015. This target can be met by increasing bioenergy production in the region by 4 Terrawatt-hours (Twh) – equivalent to about an extra million tonnes of low moisture content woodchip and straw. This also means that Central Finland will reach close to its maximum theoretically sustainable level in biomass utilisation. To help achieve this target the Regional Council has launched a bioenergy cluster program called Dynamic Bioenergy, which will be managed by the JAMK University of Applied Sciences.

So how does all this relate to Ballarat?

In the Ballarat region we have many positive aspects of location, history, a reputation for producing quality food and wine, a diverse range of education institutions, well-resourced health care, a base of manufacturing and service industry, and a strong cultural and environmental base to build on. We do have some venues for conferences and a growing supply of accommodation. But there is certainly room for a thoughtfully guided development of all of this, and a city like Jyväskylä may be a useful guide, though there are obviously many others.

For a central city convention centre a refitted Civic Centre may serve adequately, in combination with current spaces within the central city area including the UB Arts precinct, and the UB School of Mines precinct. For accommodation private investment will be able to provide the necessary room numbers when it sees that the market is there for investment confidence. The city may see it as a suitable option to provide or initially underwrite a staffed office for formal city assistance in convention organisation. It is clear that Ballarat has the potential to provide skilled and trained people to manage the expanding system, provided expansion is incremental.

Do we have the basis for thinking that we are a suitable venue?

Do we need to create the sort of employment and training opportunities such a direction would bring?

Do we have the scope within the universities, farming community, city planning area, environmental movement, energy development, private and public schools, and historic and cultural sectors to support and maintain such an approach? Yes, of course, to all of these questions.

Do we have the money to stimulate this approach? The proposed demolition and rebuilding of the Civic Centre is to cost about \$40 million. An alternative option that could have a far more positive outcome (ongoing sources of revenue, major retention of energy expenditure in the regional economy, a major job creation project and a definite attraction for a range of industry) if the money is spent instead as -

| Development | | \$ million |
|--|----------|-------------------|
| • refurbish the Civic Centre (CC) | 5 | |
| • develop CC biomass heating/cooling, water treatment, etc | | 2 |
| • necessary infrastructure for other convention sites, parking etc | 4 | |
| • set up and staff a city conference bureau | | 1 |
| • investment (PPP) in 10 MW-e 30 MW-th CHP plant in BWEZ | 10 | |
| • investment (PPP) in anaerobic digester at BWEZ | | 5 |
| • investment in waste water treatment for Lucas and BWEZ | | 2 |
| • investment in recycling centre and RDF pellet plant in BWEZ | 3 | |
| • investment in biomass heating in Aquatic centre and other sites | 5 | |
| • invest in bicycle infrastructure – parking, lanes, separate trails | <u>5</u> | |
| | total | 40 |