

- Title

A Study on Regional Development and Internationalization by Regional Universities in Austria

- Research Overview

This presentation examines regional collaboration and internationalization initiatives at regional universities in Austria. It focuses on three universities located in rural areas. By analyzing the strategies employed by these regional universities—which face a competitive disadvantage compared to their urban counterparts—that aims to provide insights applicable to Japan.

- Purpose of Study

In recent years, the youth population and the number of students entering higher education have begun to decline, particularly in developed countries such as Japan, leading to increasingly hard competition among universities to attract students. Furthermore, while higher education reforms aimed at enhancing university competitiveness are underway, these reforms often focus primarily on large universities in urban areas. Regional universities tend to score low on numerical criteria such as competitiveness and have sometimes been targeted for budget cuts or mergers and closures. In Japan, the central government provides grants to help narrow the gap between urban and rural areas; however, the purpose of these programs is to promote regional industry, not to support local universities. Against this background, the challenge lies in how to move forward with “creating ‘shining local universities’ that attract students from across Japan and around the world” (Osaki; 2).

This presentation takes Austria in Central Europe as a case study to show how regional universities are structured to incorporate the perspectives of diverse stakeholders. Specifically, it shows various initiatives, such as regional collaboration and internationalization, and proves that these are the key to the development of the entire region. This is because regional collaboration makes it possible to reflect diverse local perspectives, while internationalization enables regional universities to advance globalization from the local level by collaborating across national borders.

• Research Methods

In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine the initiatives of regional universities in Austria. Universities of Applied Sciences (Fachhochschulen in German), established in Austria in the 1990s, differ from traditional general universities in that their curricula are legally limited to practice-oriented content, and they are not allowed to offer doctoral programs. In addition, many of them are heavily influenced by local governments. The institutions examined were the University of Applied Sciences Burgenland (Hochschule Burgenland), the Health University of Applied Sciences Tyrol (FH Gesundheit Tirol), and the University of Applied Sciences Kufstein (Fachhochschule Kufstein). The interview at the University of Applied Sciences Burgenland was conducted on November 27, 2025, with the head of the quality assurance department. The interview at the University of Applied Sciences for Health in Tyrol was conducted on March 24, 2026, with the head of administration, and the interview at the University of Applied Sciences Kufstein conducted on March 25, 2026, with the head of administration. In all cases, the questions were sent in advance, and the interviews were conducted in person.

• Results and Discussion

It has become clear that regional universities in Austria can be divided into two categories: those that emphasize collaboration with the local community and those that emphasize internationalization. Burgenland University of Applied Sciences is located in the Vienna metropolitan area, and due to difficult competition from higher education institutions in Vienna, it is shifting its focus toward internationalization. These include accepting internationally working adults as students and establishing joint doctoral programs with universities in Eastern Europe. In contrast, the Tyrolean University of Applied Health Sciences places a strong emphasis on training students from the Tyrol region. Kufstein University of Applied Sciences maintains strong ties to the local community while also pursuing internationalization.

It has become clear that regional universities in Austria are addressing competition from urban universities by pursuing both localization and globalization. This development is not driven by the decisions of individual universities alone but rather involves a wide range of stakeholders. The challenge lies in determining whether the Austrian model can be applied to Japan. Unlike Austria, a small-to-medium-sized country, Japan has a large population and a significant disparity between urban and rural

areas. Furthermore, many Japanese universities are private, which differs from the situation in Austria, where local governments are heavily involved in universities of applied sciences. In any case, it is desirable for regional universities and their local communities to form a relationship in which they “develop together and survive” (Kawazoe:49).

References (Japanese)

- Hitoshi Osaki, “Challenges in Promoting Regional Universities,” *IDE:

Contemporary Higher Education*, No. 678, 2026.

- Shinsuke Kawazoe, “Regional Communities and Universities Developing Together:

The Challenge of the ‘Fukuchiyama Model,’” *IDE: Contemporary Higher Education*, No. 678, 2026.

- Keywords

Austria, regional universities, regional collaboration, internationalization