



Enhancing Quality Assurance through Interdisciplinary Cooperation & Community Engagement: A Longitudinal Study of Turkish Universities' Service to Society

DR. M. AYŞEGÜL KOZAK ÇAKIR
EQUAF, UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE, NETHERLANDS

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What is Quality?

- ▶ Quality in higher education is multi-dimensional and embraces all functions and activities of a university including teaching, academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, facilities, equipment, services to the community and the academic environment.
- ▶ Uvah (2005) believes that the **quality of university graduates could be measured by how well they have been prepared for life and for service to society** in various spheres of human endeavor.
- ▶ «The academy must become a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems, and must reaffirm its historic commitment to what I call the scholarship of engagement» (Ernest Boyer, 1997, p. 11).

Research Question and the Aim of the study

- ▶ The study explores how accredited HEIs in Turkey conceptualize and articulate their perspectives on "service to society" within the context of the THEQC accreditation framework and how HEI's understanding and implementation of community engagement have changed and whether these changes reflect improved interdisciplinary cooperation and integration with local communities and enterprises
- ▶ The study aims to understand how these perspectives have evolved over the years,
- ▶ randomly selected 20 THEQC-accredited HEI's yearly institutional self-assessment reports (ISERs from 2021 to 2023) to see if and how cooperation and coordination efforts have enhanced their realization of this specific THEQC criterion.
- ▶ By doing so, the paper aims to answer the question of what role quality assurance plays in fostering these different types of cooperation, including interdisciplinarity, combining the different university missions for quality education and research, and innovative initiatives such as service learning.

Method

- ▶ qualitative longitudinal analysis
- ▶ 20 HEIs ISERs from from 2021 to 2023, mainly focusing on «service to society sections)
- ▶ 20 universities selected through random sampling to ensure diverse representation, including both public and private institutions across various regions

Definitions

engagement refers to the range of ways in which university staff, students and management interact with external communities in mutually beneficial ways, either as part of teaching and research or as part of other projects and joint initiatives;

community is defined as 'communities of place, identity or interest', and thus includes among others, public authorities, businesses, schools, civil society and citizens;

societal needs addressed through community engagement refer to all political, economic, cultural, social, technological and environmental factors that influence the quality of life within society.

THIRD MISSION of HEI

The term is mainly been linked to the economic sphere

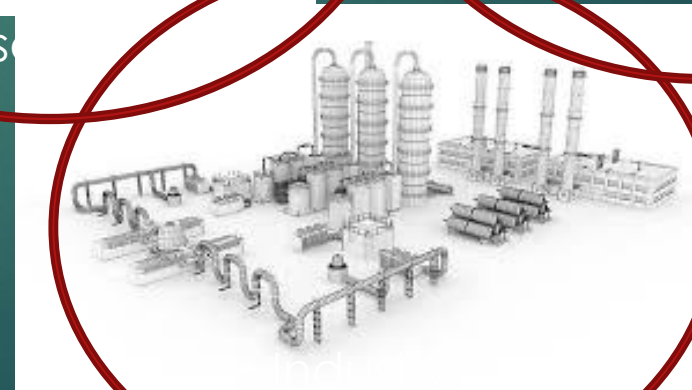
- Innovation
- Patent
- Technology transfer
- Commercialization of research
- Cooperation with industry



Research



Learning



Third mission beyond economic sphere

- ▶ Social justice
- ▶ Global challenges (eg climate change, immigration, water)
- ▶ Social cohesion
- ▶ Social responsibility (in teaching and research)
- ▶ Service learning
- ▶ Engaged scholarship
- ▶ Cultural and arts
- ▶ Civic values
- ▶ Democratic values
- ▶ Volunteering
- ▶ Open science
- ▶ Open university
- ▶ Citizen Science

Third Mission AKA Service to Society

- ▶ Community engagement is fundamental for tertiary education, as it allows universities to connect with external stakeholders, create social impact, and improve the development of strategies for public engagement
- ▶ Social responsibility is no longer a 'fashionable' term when it comes to education, especially within the realm of higher education.
- ▶ It has become an inherent part of many universities under the name of **third mission**, globally, side-by-side with the traditional missions of HEIs
- ▶ The broader societal contribution, social responsibility, service to society aspects of higher education have become increasingly prominent

Third Mission and THEQC Criteria

- ▶ Still not part of ESG
 - ▶ Still mostly not covered by many agencies
 - ▶ hard to assess the quality
- ▶ THEQC conceptualizes third mission as one of the main roles of a university
- ▶ framework encourages universities to embed community engagement as a strategic objective
- ▶ Require them to submit their stance on service to society in their yearly SAR

THIRD MISSION IN THEQC RUBRIC

- ▶ Service to society

- ▶ D.1. Management of Service to Society Processes and the Service to Society Resources

- ▶ The institution should manage its service to society activities in accordance with its strategic objectives and goals. The institution should provide the required physical infrastructure and financial resources for these activities and enable their effective use.

- ▶ D.1.1. Management of service to society processes

The service to society policy, the management of the service to society processes, and their organizational structure are institutionalized

- ▶ D.1.2. Resources

Resources allocated to service to society activities (financial, physical, human power) are determined, shared, and institutionalized; they are monitored and assessed. D.2. The Service to Society Resources

- ▶ D.2. Service to Society Performance

- ▶ The institution should periodically monitor and continuously improve the activities it maintains in line with its service to society strategy and objectives.

- ▶ D.2.1. The follow-up and evaluation of service to society performance

- ▶ The institution engages in service to society activities that align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, can meet the needs of the society including the disadvantaged groups and the environment, and add value. Service to society activities such as institutional collaborations on national and international levels, appointments to various public institutions and organizations, as well as the training, service, research, advising

FINDINGS:

How HEIs conceptualize S.S?

- ▶ 18 out of 20 universities conceptualize service to society as an essential component of their institutional mission, while all integrate it into strategic goals that align with local, regional, and national development objectives
 - ▶ E.g: One university define it as a vital for university`s reputation and belonging to its community and its students and staff
- ▶ As a key component of their institutional mission
- ▶ While each institution has its unique focus areas and strategies, they collectively highlight the importance of integrating community and define it as part of their core operations, stating that education serves not only the development of individuals but also contributes significantly to societal advancement

FINDINGS:

How HEIs define Service to Society

- ▶ Educational Outreach and Lifelong Learning
- ▶ Service learning
- ▶ Collaborative Research and Innovation
- ▶ Interdisciplinary Projects
- ▶ Volunteer Activities
- ▶ Sustainability Projects

2021

- ▶ Initial efforts were primarily centered on traditional forms of public engagement, such as seminars and workshops, 14 HEI
- ▶ Volunteer projects were also reported by 12 institutions, focusing on short-term initiatives like community clean-up events and educational support.
- ▶ If university is offering health education, health related services offered to community becomes most referred mean
- ▶ Service learning is still in its infancy, integrated by only six universities,
- ▶ interdisciplinary projects were reported in a similarly modest scope (six universities).
- ▶ Collaborative research partnerships addressing public health and urban development were limited, mentioned by only five universities.
- ▶ Partnerships with NGOs or businesses were sparse, noted by just four institutions,
- ▶ sustainability-focused projects were minimal, with only three universities mentioning such initiatives

2022

- ▶ expansion in the integration of service learning into university curricula, with 12 universities incorporating these programs.
- ▶ Public outreach activities continued to grow, reported by 17 institutions.
- ▶ Collaborative research efforts involving local partners nearly doubled, with a focus on addressing urban development and public health challenges.
- ▶ Nine universities highlighted interdisciplinary projects that combined different academic departments to tackle societal issues.
- ▶ Partnerships with NGOs and local businesses increased to eight universities, reflecting an enhanced focus on external collaboration.
- ▶ Sustainability projects began to gain traction, mentioned by seven institutions.

2023

- ▶ community engagement became more embedded in university strategies. volunteer activities were sustained or slightly increased (Maraş Earthquake)
- ▶ Eighteen universities reported conducting extensive public seminars and workshops, and
- ▶ The integration of service learning was now mentioned by 16 universities, yet still limited to school of education in majority of HEIs, and not mentioned in Service to Society Section
- ▶ Collaborative research projects with local stakeholders grew to 14 universities, with many reporting comprehensive studies that addressed environmental sustainability and public health.
- ▶ Sixteen universities engaged in interdisciplinary projects that connected faculties across different fields, (mainly earthquake related).
- ▶ Partnerships with NGOs and businesses expanded substantially to 15 institutions, indicating stronger university-industry linkages.
- ▶ Sustainability projects were reported by 15 universities, signifying a significant strategic shift towards long-term environmental and social responsibility.

The Results:

The Role of Quality Assurance in Driving Change

- ▶ In 2021, many universities primarily focused on traditional forms of public outreach, such as seminars and workshops,
- ▶ by 2023, the data revealed a shift towards more integrated and strategic practices, including interdisciplinary projects involving multiple faculties and external partners.
- ▶ HEIs to move beyond ad hoc activities and adopt sustainable, institution-wide initiatives that align teaching, research, and community impact.

Challenges and Recommendations

- ▶ The hardship to assess the impact. Although there is a strong emphasis on measuring the impact of community engagement activities, with clear metrics and regular reporting mechanisms in place measuring impact still stays a hardship for universities
- ▶ There is a need for *strengthening the visibility and prevalence of service learning throughout the HEIs*
- ▶ Need for *broadening faculty engagement and incentives*
- ▶ Aligning community service activities with academic goals and ensuring sustainable impact

To Sum

- ▶ The self-evaluation reports highlight a strong commitment to integrating service to society into the core missions of universities. These institutions are actively seeking to impact societal change through education, community engagement, and sustainability initiatives, which are strategically aligned with their long-term goals. This demonstrates a proactive approach to not only advancing educational objectives but also contributing to societal progress and development.

THANK YOU