

CURRENT AND FUTURE MISSIONS OF A UNIVERSITY: AN INSTITUTIONAL CASE FROM TURKEY

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Abstract – *The data used in this paper were derived from a larger research project that was designed to assess the quality of various dimensions of the Middle East Technical University (METU), a leading, large, public university, in Turkey. By using a qualitative research design, this study reports the findings on the perceptions of a randomly selected group of faculty members, students, administrators, graduates, parents, and managers of public and private agencies on current and future roles or functions of the Middle East Technical University. Findings of the study indicate that in three domains, METU is seen no different than any typical university in the West, that is, it adheres to traditional/universal functions of a typical modern university: teaching, research, and service. In addition to these, interviewees ascribe three more functions to the university: a leading role for the country's economic and social development, an international or global orientation and student character development or formation.*

Introduction

What is the idea, the ideal, and the concept of a university? This fundamental question has been debated for over nine centuries since the creation of the universities of Bologna, Paris and Oxford. Scholars and philosophers seem to take a more theoretical approach and write about the idea or ideal, mission or function, while leaders and practitioners of university administration and governance refer more to the purpose, the role, the tasks, the uses of the university (Michaud 1991: 45).

Rüegg (1992) reports that there were two fundamental expectations in the origin of the universities at the end of the 12th century: (1) The universities were meant to engage in fundamental discovery as well as criticising and extending the traditional view of the world, and (2) they had to train persons who would enter the intellectual-practical professions to deal with social and political problems in an intellectually disciplined way.

Especially in the West, through the secularisation of state and separation of universities from the religious order (Simsek and Heydinger, 1993; Heydinger and Simsek, 1992), university in the modern age is identified with three basic functions: research, teaching, and service.

Similar to other contemporary social organisations, the 'university' concept has shown a phenomenal evolution in its position in modern societies. 'The university as an institution has escaped restriction by the university as an idea. If it had not been able freely to adapt to succeeding socio-economic orders, to radical shifts in science and intellectual culture, it would have long ago passed into history. That it has not done so, that in the late 20th century the university remains a powerful and pervasive institutional form, not just in the West but throughout the world' (Scott 1993: 4).

In their study on European and French universities, Martin and Verdaguer (1995) argued that higher education, nowadays, must be viewed as a useful, high level, yet mass produced education, including higher vocational training and continuing education, and research including applied research and R&D. In addition to these, universities also carry out other functions such as '...consultation services, technology transfer, and the incubation or nursing of new industrial and business firms' (Martin and Verdaguer 1995: 25).

In explaining the Partnership University model, Stauffer adds a fourth function to the classical three functions of modern universities in the 1990s, namely regional economic and cultural development. 'This means that the university's leadership is publicly visible on behalf of economic and cultural development, such as by serving on citizen boards, putting together economic development mechanisms, offering help to regional business leaders to attract new jobs to the area, and encouraging the visual and performing arts' (Stauffer 1990: 21).

Smilor, Dietrich and Gibson (1993) report a transformation in some American universities. They argue that the entrepreneurial university is emerging out of the classical roles of research, teaching and service. The essence of the entrepreneurial university is the direct involvement of universities 'in the commercialisation of research activities, a more proactive approach to regional economic development, a more problem-solving and data-driven approach to curriculum development, and a new emphasis on applying the principles of total quality management to university operations' (Smilor, Dietrich and Gibson 1993: 1).

Besides these perspectives which ascribe some new and non-traditional roles to universities, some others believe that the university is still the same entity which was defined by Wilhelm von Humboldt 180 years ago:

'Humboldt conceived of the university as an institution of research and teaching... He very explicitly declared the unity of teaching and research... He did not think that a university was either a machine for producing professional persons – lawyers, civil servants, engineers and physicians – for which there was an effective demand, or for turning out scientific knowledge. He

thought that fundamental to both of these was the cultivation of the ideal of the pursuit of truth and the ordering of life around that pursuit... Study in a university, in the presence of persons teaching, studying and investigating a large variety of subjects, helps to precipitate and maintain the academic and scientific ethos. One of the main functions of the university is to instil the academic and the scientific ethos' (Shils 1992: 301-312).

Michaud (1991) also argues that the modern university can be explained with three basic missions involving six different functions:

1. Intellectual mission that involves teaching and research functions
2. Social mission that involves vocational and service functions
3. Educational mission that involves cultural and humanist functions

However, according to Michaud (1991), none of these functions are watertight. This tripartite functioning has never been perfectly achieved. Today, the Western World is in the process of redefining the basic mission of the university as a response to accumulated problems of heavy reliance on one or two of these functions and to the pressures of the emerging Information Age. For example, some are very critical of the modern universities because they are considered to have drifted away from teaching, and are too reliant on research (Boyer, 1990; Heydinger and Simsek, 1992). On the contrary, some portray a different university in the coming age of postindustrial environments. Recent attempts defining the idea of the university in the 21st century basically look at the conditions stemming from both external and internal dynamics that are shaping the system such as a changing sociocultural context, demographic shifts, international competition as well as cooperation, technological change, influence of public perceptions, shifts in expectations and values of the constituencies of the university (Fincher, 1993; Scott, 1993; Rüegg, 1992).

Purpose and statement of the problem

In general, there is an increasing demand for higher education in Turkey. Many parents expect their children to become university graduates. They are concerned that their children get a good higher education, one that will allow them to obtain higher qualifications and well-paid jobs. Governments are interested in the output of education as trained labor power. Employers are concerned with the quality of contemporary education and whether it provides suitable recruits for their enterprises. Therefore, there occurs a gap between high expectations and supply

for this increasing demand. Within this context, it becomes crucial to explore what the Middle East Technical University (METU) is and what it should be in the future from the perspectives of its most important stakeholders: faculty members, students, administrators, graduates, parents, and managers of public and private agencies.

To do this, the following two research questions have guided the data collection and analysis processes:

(1) What are the perceptions of different stakeholders (faculty members, students, administrators, graduates, parents, and managers of public and private agencies) on the *current* mission and functions of a leading public university, METU, in Turkey?

(2). What are the perceptions of different stakeholders (faculty members, students, administrators, graduates, parents, and managers of public and private agencies) on the *future* mission and functions of METU? In other words, where should this university go in terms of its basic mission and functions?

Case: the Middle East Technical University

The Middle East Technical University (METU), located in the Turkish capital, Ankara, is one of 68 publicly funded Turkish universities. It was founded in 1956 with the idea that housing and planning conditions in Turkey needed qualified technicians trained in these professions. So, it was established under the name of Institute of City Planning and High Technology with 36 students and 4 instructors. One of its founding goals was to create an institution that could serve the whole Middle East region, which is why English became the language of the institution.

In October 1957, it gained university status with several technical departments: Mechanical, Civil, Electrical and Chemical Engineering. Between the years 1957 and 1963, the METU campus consisted of temporary buildings in the city. Its current campus, originally planned to meet the needs of 12,000 students, was opened in 1963. Over the years, its growth has been phenomenal in terms of number of students, faculty, personnel and facilities, and, has been one of the several highly reputed universities in Turkey. The success can be attributed to such factors as English instruction, qualified academics, country- and region-specific research facilities.

METU has established close contacts with other universities around the world and has many joint research projects, as well as international faculty and student exchange programs. Because of its international character, students from 54 different countries have received undergraduate as well as graduate degrees from the institution to this date.

Compared to other Turkish universities, it has facilities of the highest quality such as 35 research centres, a library of 275,310 books and 119,000 bound periodicals, a computer center with campus-wide extensive networking capabilities, connecting the institution to world wide Internet as well as to the national research network. Being a campus located on the outskirts of metropolitan Ankara and having high quality sports and recreational facilities, housing and dormitories for academicians and students, it is identified with a strong METU culture, and a lively social environment.

Up to 1982, it was governed by a board of trustees and had a substantial degree of autonomy. This administrative style was apparently borrowed from the U.S. universities, and was the only higher education institution with this special status defined by law. However, with the establishment of the Higher Education Council (HEC) in 1982, it was put under the centralised machinery of HEC. Academics opposed many provisions in the HEC's law since they perceived them as potential threats to academic freedom and autonomy. Consequently, many of them left the University. Moreover, curricular changes imposed by HEC coupled with a capacity increase after 1982 created quality concerns, especially at the undergraduate level. For example, the number of students reached 17,000 in 1984, and 22,000 in 1992.

Within the past 40 years since its foundation, METU has awarded 40,000 undergraduate degrees, 8000 Masters-level and 565 doctoral degrees. The University employs 2,011 academic personnel. The number of graduate students was 2,781 in 1994, and it has been increased to 3,314 in 1995, which represents around 20% increase in just one academic year. This is consistent with the President's declared intention to shift the focus from undergraduate to graduate education.

On the other hand, as the President pointed out in his opening speech for the 1993-94 academic year, faculty at METU carried out 1/3 of all basic and applied research studies (except Health Sciences) in the nation, and coordinated 1/3 of international congresses, conferences and seminars in 1992. In addition, they produced approximately 1/3 of all international publications nationwide. In spite of these, the University's budget was only 1/25 of the total sum being distributed to the existing 68 state universities. Moreover, the salary of faculty members working at METU is less than half that of those working in private universities. In addition, private universities with better research facilities, higher income and accommodation, have become alternatives for faculty members experiencing financial difficulties at the University. Consequently, it has become difficult for METU to recruit and to maintain good faculty members.

The university has lost its financial capacity in its establishment years and could not preserve its traditional attractiveness in the eyes of successful and

brilliant young scholars. Consequently, the University has come to a position of loosing its dynamism (Süha Sevük, Parlar Foundation Award Ceremony, 1992). As the total number of state universities has risen from 29 to 68 within the last ten years, it is unfortunately clear that METU's share from state resources will dramatically decrease in the coming years.

The environment drastically changed for the University in the mid-1980s as the new private universities entered the scene. First, Bilkent University was founded in 1986 in Ankara just two miles west of METU. Its founding principles were almost the same as those of METU: English instruction, quality faculty who teach and write in English, international publications, technical/engineering fields and research emphasis. Since the early 1990s, other private universities followed suit on almost the same principles: Koc University in Istanbul founded by Turkey's largest corporation, Galatasaray University, and Sabanci University, founded by the country's second largest corporation, Sabanci Corporation.

Despite all these problems, and, although it is a state university, METU has always been present in the competition for national leadership and international recognition. Moreover, it is striving to continue to be a leading higher education institution with the orientation toward research and graduate education.

When in 1992 the present President assumed office at the University, he launched a reform initiative and defined the mission of the university as being that of producing graduates who could compete at international level, who could give support to industry, and who could contribute to the advancement of science through the attainment of universal standards. He succeeded in convincing HEC that METU must change and emphasised that the university was bound to experience quality deterioration in many domains (student, faculty, facilities, research and teaching), since it had grown exceedingly in size, and had lost the leading role for the country.

Method

As stated earlier, the data used in this paper were collected as part of a larger research project that was designed to assess institutional quality in various domains. In order to collect data on the current and future mission and institutional functions of the university, two research questions were designed. The first one focused on gathering perceptions of the most important mission or functions that the Middle East Technical University can be identified with. The second question focused on opinions as to the most important mission or functions of METU.

The research design included a total of 80 individuals. These individuals represented the following stakeholders: 3 of a total of 5 college deans, 5

department heads, 10 faculty members from different colleges and disciplines, 12 administrative personnel, 12 students representing five different colleges and departments, 7 unit heads, high level administrators from 18 public and private agencies that hire the largest number of METU graduates, 7 graduates of the university, and 6 parents whose children are currently at the university. A clustered random sampling was used to form the sample.

A letter first informed these individuals about the research followed by telephone contacts. Personal interviews were used to collect data. A semi-structured interview technique was used. A typical interview ran for about 45 minutes, and interviews were tape-recorded. A professional typist later transcribed *verbatim* each recorded interview. The interview data were subjected to content analysis (Patton, 1987; Miles and Huberman, 1994). The researchers first coded all the data using a predefined set of categories that are roughly equivalent to the research questions presented earlier. Both researchers went through all the notes to check each other's coding, and this process established consistency in the assignment of codes to the same phenomenon. Second, the descriptive codes were grouped in categories that fit together meaningfully. These categories allowed an identification of the main themes present in the data. Third, by using thematic codes, the interview data were examined again and restructured according to these themes. Then, a third level thematic coding was carried out to determine the general descriptive themes for the data.

Limitations

We would like to raise some thoughts on two important areas of limitations pertaining to our research: First of all, the case of the Middle East Technical University may raise doubts among some readers as to whether or not METU is a typical conventional comprehensive university offering a broad range of curricula in humanities, sciences and social sciences. Some even would argue that METU resembles rather more a high level professional institute, such as MIT and many other technical universities and/or institutes in other parts of the world geared mainly to train professional engineers and technicians as well as some other professionals. This description would certainly be a true description of METU in the 1960s and the 1970s; however, since 1983, METU, with its phenomenal growth, has gone a long way towards becoming a rather comprehensive university with its five colleges encompassing 35 departments. But it is still too small compared with Turkey's other older and larger universities such as Istanbul University and Ankara University or Europe's and North America's large public universities. Since we used a case study design that does

not permit for generalisations to the wider population, our results should still be read with caution in the sense that they describe a particular higher education institution.

Secondly, the term 'university' is very hard to define succinctly owing to its tremendous variety in the West and in other parts of the world. Because of the lack of an agreement in the higher education literature as to the idea or ideal of university as well as a great variety of institutions across the nations and within a single national higher education system, the literature we provided in the introduction is rather a sketchy overview of the concept of university rather than a complete treatment of the idea of university in its fullest sense.

Results

Current mission and functions of the University

As Table 1 shows, the analysis of data reveals that all the groups involved in the present research see the Middle East Technical University as a predominantly teaching institution (around 54% of all interviewees). Furthermore, the interviewees see the research function as the second most important function in the university (20%) followed by international relations (11%), a pioneering or leading role (9%) and a service function (6%).

Teaching is one of the primary roles of modern universities today. However, our results indicate that 54% of the stakeholders of this university perceive the teaching role as the primary function of the university in so far as teaching seems to be the one and the only function of the university. Interestingly, the difference between the teaching function and the research function, which was rated the second in order, is more than twice higher (54% vs. 20%). Second, although all groups place the teaching function at the top of the list, administrative personnel, employers and students chose the teaching function with a great margin compared to other four functions (see Table 1).

Regarding the research function that was placed second after the teaching function (20%), results presented in Table 1 indicate that faculty members and academic administrators involving deans and department chairs rated the research function at a relatively high rate with respect to their sample size. The internal and external stakeholders, on the other hand, rated the service function as the least important function of the university with a 6% of total rating. During the interviews, most of the 'insiders' and 'outsiders' interviewed spoke about the university as being too distant from the realities of the country, too distant from technology and knowledge transfer to the related sectors of the economy and

TABLE 1: Distributed Results on the Current Mission and Functions of the University

Current Mission & Functions	f n=8	%	Faculty Members, n=10	Academic Adm. (Deans & Dept. Chairs), n=8	Adm. Personnel (Unit Heads & Adm. Personnel) n=20	Employers (Adm. Private & Public Comp), n=18	Students, n=12	Graduates, n=7	Parents, n=5
1. Teaching	43	54	4	3	12	10	9	3	2
2. Research	16	20	3	2	3	3	2	1	2
3. International Orientation	9	11	1	2	2	3	-	1	-
4. Pioneering or leading role	7	9	1	-	2	2	1	-	1
5. Service	5	6	1	1	1	-	-	2	-

TABLE 2: Distributed Results on the Future Mission and Functions of the University

Future Mission & Functions	f n=8	%	Faculty Members, n=10	Academic Adm. (Deans & Dept. Chairs), n=8	Adm. Personnel (Unit Heads & Adm. Personnel) n=20	Employers (Adm. Private & Public Comp), n=18	Students, n=12	Graduates, n=7	Parents, n=5
1. Teaching	43	54	4	3	12	10	9	3	2
2. Pioneering or leading role	16	20	3	2	3	3	2	1	2
3. International Orientation	9	11	1	2	2	3	-	1	-
4. Service	7	9	1	-	2	2	1	-	1
5. Research	5	6	1	1	1	-	-	2	-
6. Graduate Studies	10	12	2	-	4	3	-	1	-

industry, and too distant from the social problems of the country. They rather wanted to see the university more active in these domains in terms of providing solutions to the problems of different kinds the Turkish society struggles with.

The question of why the teaching function was rated highest by the interviewees deserves attention. Many interviewed individuals, especially informed stakeholders such as faculty members and administrators, consider that the establishment of Higher Education Council in 1983 led to a loss of the university's autonomy. To them, this increased the tendency towards a severe centralisation, which gave way for establishing channels for political intrusion and interference by the governments in the operation of universities. It is the general feeling among the university community that the number of students admitted to the University following the pressure exerted by the Higher Education Council – leading to the doubling of the student population – has been far from beneficial, particularly since there was no significant improvement of facilities, human and other resources. For example, the student population was about 12,000 before the establishment of the Higher Education Council in 1982. It was increased to 17,000 in 1984 and 22,000 in 1992. This finding is interesting in the sense that it provides an additional evidence to an inverse relationship between size and quality as observed in higher education sector of other (developed) countries (Mayhew, Ford and Hubbard, 1990; Simsek and Louis, 1994).

Internal groups such as students and academics mentioned that although the university has largely been a teaching institution in recent years, conditions of teaching are largely inadequate: crowded classrooms, poor advisory system, inadequate infrastructure of physical facilities, and a dehumanised university atmosphere are some of the problem areas associated with the quality of teaching. This may mean that being a teaching institution does not guarantee a high quality teaching performance for a university. In recognising these difficulties, the current President of the university - who is now serving his second term - initiated a restructuring in 1993. This exercise included the reduction of the undergraduate population in order to enhance teaching quality, as well as the strengthening of graduate level and research (Simsek and Aytemiz, 1998).

On the other hand, groups involved in the present study noted that the university had lost some of its most traditional features, including its international character in the region, its pioneering role in training high level professionals (and particularly engineers), as well as its campus atmosphere, which had previously been democratic and egalitarian. Many people from internal and external interest groups think that the university has turned itself into an ivory tower. The university's faculty members in particular think that the university should renew its original commitment and assert its identity as an international university in the region, besides focusing on training graduates in critical and emerging areas of

science and technology. This need was also mentioned in another study carried out by Guruz et.al. (1994: 188), where it was pointed out that Turkey is in a critical need of qualified people in electronics, biotechnology, molecular technology, informatics, photonics, robotics, ceramics and composite materials.

Future (ideal) mission and functions of the University

Results regarding the future mission and functions of the University are presented in Table 2. It becomes clear that there are six functions that the University is expected to be associated with from the perspectives of interviewed groups: Teaching (32%), pioneering or leadership role for the country (20%), international relations or orientation (13%), service (13%), research (10%), and character development (12%).

Compared to the previously presented results concerning the current mission and functions of the University, interviewees' expectations of the future functions of the university are different from those experienced with respect to the current situation. First, there was a drop from 54% to 32% in terms of the perceived importance of the teaching function of the university. This may imply that the University's internal and external stakeholders desire the University to shift away from its heavy involvement in teaching and to establish a balance among a number of other equally important functions.

As Table 2 shows, around one third of the interviewed people (32%) still think that the university should emphasise teaching. The emphasis here is, however, on the establishment of a democratic teaching-learning atmosphere, that is a democratic, free, participative teaching-learning climate which is not isolated from societal problems. The internal stakeholders in particular – i.e. faculty members, deans, department chairs and students – repeatedly pointed out that the perceived deterioration in the quality of teaching may be partially remedied by creating a more democratic and participative teaching-learning environment.

The current university administration appears to have acknowledged this problem given the direction it embarked upon in the restructuring plan of 1993. The first target was to decrease the number of undergraduate students (Middle East Technical University, Draft Strategic Plan 1995-2000). The administration managed to convince the Higher Education Council to reduce the number of undergraduate population in favour of more graduate students, a move that serves to strengthen the research function as well. Our interpretation of this policy direction is that the university administration is attempting to alter the role, mission and function of the Middle East Technical University, steering it away from being a predominantly teaching institution towards a new identity as an elite

research institution. This goal has been explicitly articulated by the current President on various public occasions.

The pioneering or leadership role of METU (20%), together with a role in international relations (13%) appear to have significant importance in the expression of perceptions for the future role of the university. The interviewees observe that to cope with the kinds of global and regional changes, METU should be a gate to the world, thus reinventing its original mission for the situation and conditions that prevail at the end of the millennium. As in the case of many institutional restructuring efforts in many countries, globalisation is the buzzword here as well. It is not only business and industry that is becoming international and global; universities too try to exploit this opportunity to renew their basic mission and function in a changing world. It may seem that the observers we interviewed may have too many ambitions for the university, but they do this for all the right reasons. METU proved its potential during the late 1960s and 1970s by being the only English instruction public institution whose high quality graduates impressed employers with their self-confidence, field knowledge and creativity. The university used to employ the best academics who were trained abroad. This earned it the praise of the President of Turkey, Suleyman Demirel, who called METU 'one of the ten great achievements of the Republic' since its foundation in 1923. So, as one of the interviewees remarked, 'this tradition has been damaged and weakened by the policies of the last decade, but this university is still very important and it still holds a great potential; the problem is to revitalise its original innovative, pioneering mission and role for the country.'

What we called the pioneering or leading role for the university is interestingly raised in other parts of the world with different labels. For example, Stauffer (1990) developed a new label for universities, the 'partnership university', and explained it as follows: '...at partnership universities, regional economic and cultural development is a fourth institutional function after teaching, research, and service.' He then names the following universities in the US as typical partnership universities: George Mason University, the University of Houston at Clear Lake, the University of Central Florida, Miami-Dade Community College District, the University of California at Irvine, and the University of Texas at Dallas (Stauffer 1990: 24). Such voices are also heard elsewhere as Ginkel (1995: 16) reported that 'university plays and should continue to play an important role in the competitiveness of Europe.'

In terms of the international character of METU, it should be pointed out that this university was the only higher education institution in Turkey where instruction was, until the mid-1970s, in English. This special status was given to METU by law. This has made the university the only institution¹ at this level that has attracted a sizeable number of foreign academics and a considerable number

of international students from the Middle Eastern, African, Asian and East Asian countries. In addition, METU faculty has been very successful – in comparison to colleagues from other universities in the country – in organising and leading international congresses, conferences and seminars as well as in featuring in international publications. It would appear that our interviewees rated ‘international orientation’ more highly than other functions of universities – such as research and service, for instance – because they also valued the pioneering or leading role of the university. In other words, they believed that in an age of globalisation, METU should play a leadership role by being a gate to the world.

The interviewed group also reported that in the future the University should highlight its service role (13%) – a factor that was followed, in terms of emphasis, by research (10%). From this, we can say that people would like to see METU as a place that is associated with the production as well as the transfer of knowledge. There is one exception to this: Employers (public and private institutions and organisations which employ the highest number of METU graduates) reported that, in their view, the service function is presently the least emphasised role of METU. In terms of the university’s future mission and role definition, most of them rated service as the second most important function of METU after teaching. They expect the university to create conditions for knowledge and technology transfer, and to closely align its education process with the production domain.

Considering the targets specified by the current administration in the METU’s Strategic Plan (1995-2000), overall analysis of the findings shows that a public university in Turkey is no different than a university in an industrialised country in the sense that the new economic, social and international realities force universities to redefine their basic functions. Interestingly, such buzzwords as globalism and the information age also seem to shape the opinions of stakeholders in developing countries. It will be an even more challenging issue to see how higher education institutions in these countries will tackle this problem with all the inherent country-specific limitations, including less resources, autonomy problem, and ever increasing population demanding higher education.

Character development

We created a new subtitle for character development, because our data are significant in this respect. Table 2 shows an interesting phenomenon: 12% of the internal and external stakeholders ascribed another totally different mission to the university besides teaching, research, service, leading role and internationalism, namely ‘character development’ or ‘formation’. This, of course, bears a close association with the teaching function of the university, but

we think the content or what is meant by character development exceeds it. Employers, faculty members and administrative personnel in particular considered the university as a place where young people are formed and shaped based on the principals of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkish Republic. The heavy political tone in these descriptions may imply a reflection of general political climate of Turkey in the 1990s: antiseccular and Islamist movements that target foundational principals of the Republic and its founder, Atatürk, as well as separatist terrorist acts in the southeastern part of the country. This may tell us that besides the inherently classical mission and function of higher education institutions, there may be other roles ascribed to universities stemming from nation-specific or contemporary social and political issues. This may be the reason why individuals forcefully brought this up during the interviews, insisting that the University should raise a generation of well-rounded individuals and future leaders who are modern, secular, democratic, liberal, and rational. This finding indicates that beyond the three typical/generic functions of university (teaching, research and service), universities in Turkey - and perhaps in other parts of the developing world - are still seen as the engines of modernisation and of nation building. Although not strongly articulated up to now, a similar tone has now been put forward in the process of redefinition of universities' roles in the developed world. We will return to this in the following section.

Discussion and conclusions

Some call the conditions of 1990s 'postindustrial environments' – contexts which, by definition, are unpredictable, uncertain, and threatening (Cameron and Tschirhart, 1992). The early decades of the second millennium may bring more changes to the universities than their first, 1,000 years. Some of these changes may well be catastrophic (Casper, 1996). The flow of information is so fast. Throughout the world, economies are being transformed. Social values are being undermined. Political walls are falling. In the middle of this whirling change, no institution is immune (Reed, 1993). As some developments clearly indicate in many parts of the world, these conditions have led educational systems and higher education organisations to transform themselves in terms of strategy, policies, identity, role, mission and functions.

In this paper, we focused on and highlighted the perceptions and opinions of a number of internal and external regarding a large, prestigious, Turkish public university. The findings of our research indicate the following three clusters of information on the institution:

1. According to the perceptions of our interviewees, the Middle East Technical University – as a higher education institution in a developing country – adheres to the universal role or mission definition of higher education, namely teaching, research and service. The order of these three functions or missions differ when put into the context of the current or future (ideal) state of the university. Nevertheless, teaching is seen as the most primary function of the university. This expectation does not contradict the general public expectation in other parts of the world. For instance, the restructuring movements of the 1980s and the 1990s in various national higher education systems in the world, and particularly so those in North America and Europe, targeted the revitalisation of teaching through quality enhancement mechanisms (Simsek, 1996).

2. In addition to these three generic missions or functions, internal and external stakeholders report that the Middle East Technical University should carry out two other missions or functions: develop its pioneering or leading role in terms of being the engine of development, innovation and problem solving in the country, and international or global orientation. The emphasis on a pioneering or leading role is mirrored in other parts of the world. The general argument revolves around the fact that universities throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s largely drifted away from their societal roles and pressing social concerns. Now, the pendulum swings back. Public higher education institutions in particular are now made accountable for their operations, missions, roles and responsibilities to society (Stauffer, 1990; Brandstrom and Franke-Wikberg, 1992; Langer, 1990). Representatives of major internal and external stakeholders of METU whom we interviewed assign a similar social role to the university.

With regards to the international or global role, our findings indicate that interest groups attached to a public university in Turkey are well aware of the process of global transformation in many aspects of life, and they want their university to transform itself accordingly. The majority of these stakeholders believe that METU's current mission or functions involve an international/global orientation and they want this to continue. Globalisation is an important item in the restructuring agenda of many universities in the US as well. For example, it is stated in the University of Minnesota's strategic plan that 'the University's faculty, students, and staff are *international* citizens...University 2000 envisions the University of Minnesota as a *global, land-grant, research university*...' (University of Minnesota, *University 2000: A Road Map to the 21st Century*, emphasis in the original). On the other hand, Groff (1997) categorises the emerging university typologies into three groups: university, communiversity and globalversity, with the latter term referring to an international orientation, facilitating collaborative educational developments among nations.

3. On top of these five areas of mission and function, our results at METU indicate that the people we interviewed see the University as a place where young people are shaped and formed, over and above acquiring vocational skills and technical knowledge in a specific field. As we stated earlier, the interviewees desire the university to develop the necessary means to form students into secular, modern, rational, enlightened, and creative individuals who are the followers of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's principles of a modern, secular Turkish Republic. This is clearly a social as well as a political mission assigned to the University. This is consistent with what Fincher stated that 'a basic premise [of the university] should be that the education of leaders in the 21st century will not be a matter to be left to the whims of other institutions and agencies. The contemporary university has considerable expertise in the formal preparation of leadership in government, business, and various professional fields' (Fincher 1993: 37). It is important also to note here that the function of character development is not something totally new to the traditional roles of universities. For example, some highly prestigious universities in the West (e.g. Oxford and Cambridge), as well as many liberal arts colleges in the United States, were built on the idea of cultivation of one's character and the education of whole round person.

So far, our research findings indicate that the Middle East Technical University is identified with six different missions and functions: teaching, research, service, pioneering or leading role for economic and social development, international/global function, and a social/political function which we labelled as character development or formation. Overall, the accomplishment of these expectations creates a serious challenge for institutions of higher learning, be they in Turkey or elsewhere. Many observers of university organisations often find these roles or functions conflicting. Perhaps this is why Clark Kerr once called the modern university 'multiversity' (Kerr, 1982). It is very hard to predict whether the Middle East Technical University will successfully carry out all these roles or functions ascribed by its most important stakeholders in the coming years.

Notes

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