Social responsibility and engagement in higher education: Case of the ASEAN

Lorraine Pe Symaco⁎, Meng Yew Tee

⁎ Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: lorraine@symaco.org (L.P. Symaco), mytee22@yahoo.com (M.Y. Tee).

International Journal of Educational Development xxx (xxxx) xxx–xxx

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Social responsibility
Higher education
Community engagement
Sustainable development
Knowledge building
ASEAN
Boyer’s scholarship of engagement

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the role of ASEAN universities in social responsibility and sustainable development. Selected country case studies are presented to describe the changing role of universities situated in a region with great diversity and potential for further economic growth, as we explore the opportunities and challenges in promoting higher education institutions (HEIs) for greater sustainable development of communities. While there is a wide variety of initiatives—including engaging diverse communities in health, education and environmental sustainability projects—social responsibility and sustainability development is still far from being fully integrated into the core activities of the HEIs. This paper will examine the broader capacity of the universities’ engagement in social responsibility, as interpreted within Boyer’s framework on the scholarship of engagement. We argue that when HEIs develop an integral socially-responsible collaboration with the broader community, opportunities are created for unique epistemic advances for stakeholders involved.

1. Introduction

The increasing discourse on social responsibilities of universities through the augmenting roles of among others, education for sustainable development, social empowerment and capacity building among communities are all highlighted in line with the aspiration to create a higher education (HE) sector that is more inclusive, accountable and holistic. There is no doubt, given the enhanced commercialisation of services in higher education as evidenced by the global mobility of students and staff, and the attention to its assumed ‘third role’ to engage with industries/ local and regional partners, the position that this sector has occupied in the development plans of states (Muborakshoeva, 2015; Wan, 2015; Ahrens and McNamara, 2013). The established role of higher education in providing and producing human capital needed for development has all the more been highlighted with the demands of the knowledge-based economy, where government policy re-orientations focus on the expanding role of the higher education sector for socioeconomic advancement of countries. Beyond this, the role of HE in development shifts from its long-established broader capacity as a creator of knowledge and human capital, to institutions tasked to provide and edify its function in the democratisation of education and knowledge through increased access (thereby promoting (social) mobility). The role of this sector has also seen in recent times, along with the shifts in global/ environmental concerns, its duty to incorporate and educate societies for greater sustainable development.

This article will discuss the role of universities in social responsibility, broadly defined, as framed within the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) context. Selected country case studies will highlight the changing role of universities in social and sustainable development. This article will also examine opportunities and challenges in promoting higher education institutions (HEIs) for greater sustainable development of communities. The article will also discuss the broader capacity of universities’ engagement in social responsibility as exemplified through different acuities of knowledge sharing and development, as grounded within Boyer’s framework on the scholarship of engagement.

2. Higher education, development and social responsibility

The role of higher education in development is replete in literature (e.g. Pinheiro and Pillay, 2016; Huang et al., 2015; Mok, 2014). Given the increasing globalisation and internationalisation of services and calls for a broader knowledge-based economy in societies, the functional role of universities in the formation of learning regions is underscored. Higher education and its purpose to “produce a labour force that is receptive to the ever-changing functions in which it is immersed (…) and where “the formation and production of both theoretical and practical knowledge through creative research, technological diffusion...
and innovation” are seen as integral to this objective (Symaco 2012, p.40). With its assumed role in supplementing the needed human capital for development, it is of no surprise that governments worldwide have refocused their education and development policies with the intent to position and reinforce the role of the HE sector in line with socioeconomic advancement. The demands for a more efficient and effective higher education sector is also evinced by the contentious but highly prevalent world university rankings systems, an indicator of the fast- becoming competitive nature of HE systems worldwide, all through the supposed calls for better quality assurance and equally, of the utilitarian nature of this sector.

The call for a more coherent and ‘servicing’ HE sector is also exemplified by regional blocs/programmes on higher education. For instance, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), launched in 2010 during the decade anniversary of the Bologna process envisions a more “comparable, compatible and coherent” higher education system among member countries. This initiative is also reflective of the calls to harmonise the HE systems of the ASEAN, as result of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) 2015. The ASEAN, established in 1967, has grown to include ten member states, from its original five, and straddles one of the most compact regions in the world that is characterised by diverse socio-economic, political and cultural conditions.

Alongside such aims expected of HEIs is also the perceived role of universities in civic engagement. Deriving from Dewey’s emphasis on ‘engaged education’ in the 1920–30’s, Reason et al. (2013, p. 13, 15) emphasise the role of universities in personal and social responsibility through promoting civil engagement which readies individuals to “effectively communicate across demographic, ideological, and political differences”. Though not covering as much stretch in terms of higher education functions in literature, the acknowledged need to focus the HE sector for broader ‘social responsibility’ that engages the community and services for the public good can be seen emerging from declarations and meetings that position universities in providing the desired impact and influence to societies. Take for instance, the 2009 World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE), which positions the role of HE in societal change and development –the social responsibility deemed becoming of the higher education sector, where all stakeholders are expected to engage in its development.

Faced with the complexity of current and future global challenges, higher education has the social responsibility to advance our understanding of multifaceted issues, which involve social, economic, scientific and cultural dimensions and our ability to respond to them. It should lead society in generating global knowledge to address global challenges (...) (UNESCO, 2010, p. 2).

With ‘social responsibility’ broadly defined as “awareness of the social impacts of any given practice” (Jones and cited in Chile and Black 2015, p.235), the functions to which this is expressed through HEIs vary from the wider socioeconomic contribution of higher education as aforementioned– to citizenship, community engagement and capacity building, democracy and socio-environmental concerns (see Holland and Ramaley, 2008; Ward, 2003; Weerts and Sandmann, 2008). Literature has also seen the emergence of the University Social Responsibility (USR) and HE’s ‘third mission’, deriving from the wider Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of industries, and linked to the call for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The call for ESD has elicited response from various stakeholders, in line with the appeal to make certain that education systems worldwide complement and instuct values critical to a sustainable future. The Brundtland Report (1987) illustrates sustainable development as one that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (p.41), while at the same time highlighting the role of education and other institutions in providing relevant knowledge to communities in order to achieve this. Additionally, linking ESD specifically to environmental challenges and the role of the HE sector for disaster mitigation echoes clearly to countries most affected by natural calamities, which unfortunately as realities exhibit, belong mostly to the world’s poorest (Murseli and Imoto, 2014; UN, 2010).

The democratisation of knowledge which can be achieved by positioning a higher education sector that is more accessible and inclusive also draws attention to potential capacity-building strategies and community engagement, where collaborative approaches include a two-way transfer of knowledge and skills to and from universities and communities concerned. This social responsibility tenet brings to light the greater task of universities in ensuring and contributing to greater sustainable development of communities. Shiel et al (2016) document community engagement for sustainable development through educational collaborative models (for environmental and sustainability education). Such programme is said to exhibit a reciprocal partnership through a model that assumes communities as centres of learning, where students can immerse and experience first-hand the “inter-connections between environmental issues and develop their understanding of how individuals and communities interact” (p.124). This process also empowers students by making it possible for them to be active agents of social change. The universities on the one hand, through this approach, provide training, research and other services to better educate communities for designing and implementing projects related to development. Additionally, engaging marginalised groups for capacity building also avoids possible knowledge gaps where traditionally knowledge transfer is sustained through providing “differential developmental patterns in different levels of societies” (Symaco 2012, p.41) where communities in ‘non-growth’ areas, or the periphery, endure lack of engagement with the higher education sector. This also underpins the responsibility of the HE sector as a “major force in building an inclusive and diverse knowledge society” (UNESCO, 2010, p.1). The social responsibility of higher education describes the situation above drawn in rough, where we see greater capacity building and community engagement as elicited by programmes under HEIs. This onus on the university is unavoidable if one is to set an inclusive and all-engaging target for greater sustainable development of communities and regions. The following sections will re-examine Boyer’s Scholarship of Engagement as relevant to USR calls, and discuss the role of ASEAN universities in social and sustainable development, and ASEAN university initiatives and policy aspiration in line with this objective.

3. Re-examining the scholarship of engagement

While a number of works have spanned to address and extend the ideas of USR and community engagement (CE) in higher education as mentioned above, Ernest Boyer’s seminal piece on the Scholarship of Engagement (1996) highlights how this has enfolded the work broadly in HEIs. When Boyer (1996) at the time remarked on the state of American higher education, he was convinced that the “higher education in this country has an urgent obligation to become more vigorously engaged in the issues of our day (...)” (p.28). The core dimensions of Boyer’s civic engagement lies on four grounds namely, the discovery, integration, sharing and application of knowledge– all of which together aim to engage and create “a special climate in which the academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other” (p.33). Boyer’s interconnecting approach for greater CE remains foregrounded in USR calls, for instance through the ASEAN University Network’s (AUN) USR platform which will be discussed further in this paper.

Boyer’s discovery of knowledge contends the role of universities in research and knowledge creation, while the integration of knowledge places discoveries in a larger and more interdisciplinary context (p.26). The crucial role of research and knowledge creation as exemplified in Boyer’s scholarship of discovery highlights the increasing influence of collaborative research between HEIs and the community, where such research will “push back the frontiers of human knowledge” (p.26) capable of creating a more informed and engaged relationship between the two. Additionally, connecting the disciplines together through the
scholarship of integration allows for the convergence of ideas where two (or more) different disciplines “may be searching for the same interesting patterns and relationships” (p.27). Contextualising this within the broader USR framework, it features the rising calls for interdisciplinary research in higher education which will address pressing societal issues at hand. Boyer’s *discovery and integration of knowledge* both draw attention to the undeniable role of one of the central foundations of higher education, i.e. knowledge creation through research, and the interdisciplinary approach to utilising such information for greater sustainable development of communities.

The *sharing and application of knowledge* consider scholarship as a communal act where the substance of teaching to pass on knowledge is crucial, equally with the need to become ‘reflective practitioners’ where one moves from theory to practice, and so forth. Foregrounding this within the USR perspective, the *sharing and teaching of knowledge* is essential to “keep the flame of scholarship alive” where the elemental feature of teaching what one has learned will ensure that such knowledge will be passed on, and markedly benefit those at the end of receiving it and vice versa. But it cannot stop here. The scholarship of application pushes the aforementioned three dimensions further by providing for the needed “moving from theory to practice, and from practice back to theory, which in fact makes theory, then, more authentic (…)” (pp.26–27). Both scholarships of sharing knowledge and application drive Boyer’s scholarship of engagement in full circle, where “the work of the academy ultimately must be directed toward larger, more humane ends (…)” (p.27).

Boyer’s model provides a nuanced lens through which we can examine the different features of higher education as relating to broader community engagement. We can expand this lens with Popper’s distinction of the three (3) worlds—the (World 1) physical reality, (World 2) mental and the (World 3) cultural world, where meaningful and collaborative workspaces within World 3 evolves into a conducive sphere of activity in the broader call for USR. Building on Popper’s arguments, Bereiter (2002) suggest that learning needs to be reframed as collective knowledge building. The focus of epistemic change and development shifts from the individual unit to communal or collective unit. This also opens the door to how one may conceptualize and view the HEIs’ third mission and their engagement with the greater community (Mawa et al., 2016; Sandmann, 2008). Some view it as the HEI’s contribution and service to the communities through such initiatives as disseminating knowledge to the community (Weerts and Sandmann, 2008). Others view that HEIs’ engagement with the broader community ought to be a mutual and take place through substantive collaborative knowledge exchange (Holland and Ramaley, 2008), eventually maturing to a more symbiotic relationship. Additionally, internal and external services which characterise an ‘engaged campus’ links “teaching, research and service to community problems, challenges and goals (…)” (see Ward, 2003, p.123). It is in this conceptual space that the collective knowledge building lens can provide for an enabling framework for assessing the calls for USR through relevant knowledge sharing and exchange in the higher education sector.

The following section will discuss the ASEAN context and relevant calls for, and application of USR in the region as exemplified in selected country case studies.

4. The ASEAN context

Southeast Asia has come a long ways since 1967, when five nations—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand—came together to establish ASEAN. In the midst of extraordinary diversity—be it in terms of population or geographical size, politics, economics, language, religion, and ethnicity—the regional bloc has grown significantly. ASEAN now includes 10 countries, with the addition of Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam. Once largely an economic backwater used primarily for its trading routes via the Andaman Sea, Straits of Malacca and South China Sea, it has in the recent decades recorded great economic growth, second only to China. If ASEAN was fully integrated with more than 600 million in population, its combined gross domestic product (GDP) would be the seventh-largest economy in the world (ADB, 2015).

ASEAN regional diversity and growth also shows up in the development of the higher education sector within each member country. In terms of research and innovation capacity, Singapore universities are by far the leaders regionally and increasingly at a global level. Other than a select few, most HEIs in this region are still very much focussed on meeting the demands of economic growth and basic capacity building (Symaco, 2013a). However, as the region strives for growth beyond economic development, the need to be more concerted in applying concepts associated with USR and ESD has just began to form.

The ASEAN University Network - University’s Social Responsibility and Sustainability (AUN USR&R) initiative is one example of such development. Formed in 2010 by more than 20 universities from ASEAN nations, the objective of this initiative is to establish among its universities “a solid commitment of conduct for the betterment of the living society practiced by the very components of the higher education i.e. university students and the faculty staff.” (p.1) It is also in alignment with the ASEAN Socio Cultural Community Blueprint (ASCC) with emphases on goals related to human development, social welfare and protection, social justice and rights, ensuring environmental sustainability, as well as narrowing the development gap.

In this regard, HEIs have much to do, often times in their immediate vicinity. ASEAN remains home to millions of the working poor. In 2006, more than 119.5 million of ASEAN’s 260 million workers earned less than US$2 a day (ILO, 2007). An additional 28.5 million lived on less than US$1 a day. In other words, more than half of ASEAN workers and their families lived in poverty. By another measure (where the poverty line is set at US$1.25 PPP per day), ASEAN’s headcount poverty rate has declined markedly from 45 percent in 1990 to about 14 percent in 2010 (Intal et al., 2014). Based on this measure, ASEAN’s ultimate goal is to completely eradicate extreme poverty by 2030.

The economic disparity between nations are wide, and thus influencing the underlying goals and activities of HEIs in each country. Extreme poverty is largely non-existent in Singapore, Brunei, and to a lesser extent Malaysia and Thailand. On the other hand, countries such as Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and Indonesia have poverty rates above the ASEAN average. The income disparity between rural and urban areas can also be quite significant. Most of the poor tend to live in the rural areas—far away from the higher education centres—and where they are often more vulnerable to natural disasters including flooding and drought. This is where higher education institutions are needed—geographical distance notwithstanding—to not just be centres for knowledge generation and transfer, but also for bilateral knowledge sharing i.e. between university and community and vice versa. In such a relationship, opportunities can be cultivated for: a) universities to better understand and respond to the needs of the community; as well as b) to learn from the indigenous knowledge of the local community, much of which continues to remain tacit. One such example is a developing research project in University of Malaya in Malaysia, involving researchers from multiple fields working together with a community of Iban indigenous people in two-way collaborations (Jehom, 2017). The Iban shared their knowledge about their environmentally sustainable practices in the rainforest, and the researchers helped them to market the products they made and created different educational opportunities.

Another example is the collaboration between academics and local experts in featuring indigenous knowledge and practice related to traditional medicine, agriculture and crafts on display at the Fourth Higher Education Research Promotion Congress (2015) at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University (UBRU) in Thailand. At UBRU, codified knowledge and practice of traditional massage are shared with students as they become nationally certified practitioners in the area. Challenges and disparities in terms of basic quality of life—whether it has to do with education, healthcare or general social well-being—are
also significant, between and within the countries in ASEAN. For example, while youth literacy rate has improved tremendously since 1990, Cambodia and Laos lack further behind. The literacy rate for girls in these two countries are 85.9 and 78.7 percent respectively (with boys’ literacy being almost 4 and 11 percentage points higher than the girls, respectively), compared to near 100 percent in countries like Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia (Intal et al., 2015). Clearly, HEIs can play more consistent and active roles in these situations. Some cases discussed below illuminates such contributions, though there continues to be a great need for the initiatives to be more integrated into the core activities of the HEIs.

In terms of environmental sustainability, ASEAN member states has identified in the ASCC document 11 key elements for sustainable development as well as promoting a clean and green environment (see Intal et al., 2015). In each of such areas—especially in dealing with long-term environmental challenges such as water management, deforestation and land degradation, and transboundary air pollution—university and community collaborations with government and non-government agencies can form a critical foundation to what ASEAN nations deem to be wicked problems (Intal et al., 2015). The National University of Singapore (NUS), for example, initiated a highly targeted environmental education campaign as the campus and national recycling system was being marred by high levels of contamination (AUN USR&R Secretariat, 2011). A group of university staff and a student environmental group worked together to help the university establish a successful step-by-step solution, engaging students and housekeeping staff in formal and informal education campaigns as well as by redesigning the signage and recycling bin areas. While the HEIs in the more advanced ASEAN nations such as Singapore have begun to be more deliberate with environmental sustainability, the universities in the poorer nations have generally lacked behind as their focus have been more on capacity building.

Another key issue is human rights and security. Human trafficking, for example, has been a persistent and complex problem in the ASEAN region. The region continues to have one of the largest populations of trafficked persons in the world. An estimated one third of all women and children trafficked worldwide are from Southeast Asia, with 60% of these individuals residing in the ASEAN region (Cheah, 2006). Human rights issues have also proven to be difficult but broadly unaddressed by ASEAN member nations, as political dissidents and rights activists continue to face oppression. Some universities have been criticized for being subservient to the government, or for not protecting the academics who engage with controversial public discourse. In recent years, for example, a number of Malaysia’s academics have faced accusation of sedition (which carries a maximum jail term of 20 years) without support or defence by their respective universities. (Malay Mail Online, 2014)

While the USR agenda has gained momentum over the years in higher education, much has yet to be discussed in terms of how this ‘third mission’ is interpreted and contextualised in developing countries with more immediate development and capacity building concerns. This paper aims to highlight this need by focusing on South East Asia, considered as one of the most compact and dynamic regions in the world. Forged further by the recent ASEAN Economic Community, the region aims to achieve a highly integrated, cohesive and innovative community by 2025, and as ASEAN nations work towards improving higher education for economic development, it is critical that the very institutions tasked to aid in this ensure that it is done in ways that are sustainable and socially responsible.

Using documentary analysis, case studies of the founding members of the ASEAN (with the exception of Singapore), i.e., Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand are next presented to give an overview of the reforms within ASEAN HEIs in line with this objective. In addition, the extent, variety and maturity of the four (4) States’ HEIs also serve as distinguishing features in choosing the country case studies, while selected country case institutions are included based on their distinguishing USR contributions as acknowledged by the AUN’s USR agenda. Country case and HEI programmes relating to broader USR plans are discussed to contextualise such within AUN’s USR platform, and to wider community engagement as exemplified in Boyer’s framework.

4.1. Case study Indonesia

With a population close to 260 million and a country of over 17,500 islands, Indonesia remains to be one of the most populous nations, and the largest archipelago in the world (Bagyo, n.d.). Over 40 percent of Indonesia’s population (for 2014) is below 25 (CIA World Fact Book 2015), leveraging the significance of higher education access in the country. Given this, the extensive feature of the higher education system is not surprising, with the sector covering close to 3500 institutions nationally (Bagyo, n.d.). With its geographical-geologic features, Indonesia, similar to other neighbouring countries in the ASEAN, is a recurring host to a number of devastating natural disasters ranging from typhoons, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, among others. The 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake that overwhelmingly affected the Aceh province redefines the need to engage the education sector broadly, for greater sustainable development of countries. Notwithstanding, local HEIs have also focused on the need to develop extensive capacity building among communities through increased partnerships among universities, industries and societies. The following cases below demonstrate the ‘social responsibility’ precept of some universities in the country.

The Bogor Agricultural University’s (Institut Pertanian Bogor, IPB) entrepreneurial and research-based model makes it one of the prime HEI examples in Indonesia that contributes to greater socio-economic advancement through its concentrated role on technology transfer. Among its Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi (Three Pillars of National Higher Education) is its mission on community engagement (Payumo et al., 2014), as exemplified in the university’s model through the various spin-offs and local businesses created by the IPB. Such initiatives not only provide employment opportunities for the community but also enhance the marketization of indigenous innovations, where there is improved response of the university to market and social needs by “(…) uncovering a niche in knowledge creation based on indigenous and local innovations [which is] (…) benefiting Bogor and its neighbouring communities” (Payumo et al. 2014, p.29). Its vital role in national agricultural policy recommendations also indicates the university’s broader contribution to national development.

One of the core missions of the Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) is to “promote excellence in educational activities, research and community service with the interest of the Indonesia society and to participate in the Indonesian socio-cultural building” (AUN USR&R Secretariat, 2011, p.56). Civic engagement is coursed through university departments/faculties, for instance as exhibited by the Centre for Regional and Rural Development Studies which provided community services and workshops on disaster risk comprehension with earthquake victims in Central Java (AUN USR&R Secretariat, 2011). Additionally, the UGM through various faculties also improved capacity building (in technical and financial aspects) of goat farmers in the Gunung Kidul district in Yogyakarta, while assessment and exploitation of clean water in the same district was also completed. Such activities enable UGM to contribute to broader capacity building of communities by utilising “local potential (…) empowering society in order to achieve a sustainable [practice]” (AUN USR&R Secretariat 2011, p.58).

Similar to UGM, Universitas Indonesia’s (UI) commitment to social responsibility is exhibited through, among others, the creation of a comprehensive disaster management centre which advocates for disaster mitigation and outreach. The Disaster Management Centre (DMC) provided services during the 2009 West Java and West Sumatra earthquakes through rapid assessment and emergency response, and logistics and personnel services (AUN, 2010). In addition, community...
services are also provided in Depok City through general enhancement of welfare and health of city residents, through dengue fever awareness and alleviation, and promoting women empowerment by development credit awareness in marketing local products (e.g. star fruit) (AUN Secretariat, 2011).

4.2. Case study Malaysia

There are close to 600 HEIs in Malaysia, home to about 1.14 million students. Soon after the nation’s independence from the British in 1957, half of its citizens lived in absolute poverty with a GDP per capita of around US$260. Relatively few had access to primary and secondary education, and even fewer had access to tertiary education. By 2011, poverty rate dipped to 4 percent, and GDP per capita reached about US $8,000, nearly doubling each decade (Hazi & Merchant-Vega, 2011). Today, while its economy seems to be relatively healthy, it seems to have hit a middle-income trap. It is struggling to meet its goal to be a fully developed nation by 2020. Disparity between the rich and the poor has increased (Boo, 2014). The quality of its education system has become a major source of concern, with the poor feeling its greatest effects (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2012). Malaysia, for example, saw the largest decline in test scores compared to all countries participating in TIMSS over the decade, with Malaysian boys the largest hit (UNESCO, 2014, p.207). While nearly all Malaysians have access to secondary education, inequality at the post-secondary level is high: only 5 percent of young adults from the bottom income quintile earn a Bachelor’s degree, compared to 40 percent from the top quintile (Sander and Yoong, 2015).

Almost 90 percent of tuition fees for undergraduate programme at public universities are subsidised by the government. Fundamentally, universities such as University Malaya sees it as their social responsibility to help improve the nation’s quality of life, social well-being and human capital potential through it academic, research and community engagement programmes (AUN USR&R Secretariat, 2011, p.112-113). The Junior Doctors Programme is an example of a long-term, national community engagement programme that started in the 1990s. The goal of this programme was to create greater equity and access to health education for all children regardless of socioeconomic circumstances, using a sustainable model where the children themselves are empowered to give health education and conduct health promotion and education activities. It was eventually integrated into the national primary school co-curriculum programme in 2006. The programme has reached more than 29,000 children.

Many of Malaysia’s public universities’ role in civic engagement have increasingly become better organised. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), University of Malaya (UM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), for example, have created more structured platforms to enhance knowledge sharing and community engagement. UKM has restructured their management and governance system to better facilitate community engagement and sustainable development (AUN USR&R Secretariat, 2011, p.119-130). UMCare—UM’s Community & Sustainability Centre—was ratified in April 2014 to facilitate “community engagement and engagement for sustainability,” through a network of UM staffs, students and researchers, as well as collaborations with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private organisations and businesses. These collaborations have led to grassroots engagement involving, among other things, school adoption and environmental education programmes.

The Centre for Global Sustainability Studies (CGSS) at USM takes on a different approach, by focussing on “education and research-based capacity building for the implementation of sustainable development with a ‘bottom billion’ focus.” This programme moves a step closer towards a more integrated social responsibility and sustainability ethos, where service learning, community engagement and sustainability becomes an integral part of the academic and research experience. In doing so, more organic opportunities are created for students and university staff to hear and respond to the needs of society, as well as to learn from the local knowledge and wisdom.

4.3. Case study Philippines

Higher education in the Philippines continues to be one of the most extensive globally with over 2000 HEIs and over 3 million students enrolled under the system (CHED, 2016). With a characteristically young population (median age 23.4), next to only Laos in South East Asia, the perceived significance and expansion of the higher education sector in the country is evident. Public HEIs in the Philippines mainly consists of State University Colleges (SUCs) and Local University Colleges (LUCs) formed with the intention to service and provide HE services to specific regions and localities. Despite criticisms over this mass expansion and lack of quality in some SUCs and LUCs, the democratisation of access as brought forth by such institutions are argued to provide the needed ‘higher level’ knowledge that may otherwise be inaccessible to poorer communities in the country. For a country with a poverty incidence of 25.8 percent (for 2014) (NEDA, 2016), access to education institutions and specifically HEIs is a common pathway taken by Filipino families in the desire to achieve greater social mobility through the (expected) absorption in the labour market as evinced by a university degree. This contextualised ‘social responsibility’ of universities document nationally the various scholarship programmes offered by public HEIs which improve access to higher education in different regions. For instance, the University of the Philippines’ (UP) socialised tuition system (revised in 2013), provides financial assistance to students by assigning financial brackets (i.e. in terms of family income level) and allocating the necessary tuition fee waivers and stipends per student bracket. As an example, those belonging to a family income with 80,000 Philippine Pesos (Php) (i.e. about US$ 1725) or less annually, the student will get a full tuition, miscellaneous and laboratory fees waiver, in addition to a stipend which may be in the form of cash, accommodation, among others.

The role of universities in civic engagement is also exhibited in the knowledge for development community (KDC) programme of the World Bank, which currently has 19 university members nationwide. KDC institutions advocate “knowledge sharing and active citizen involvement in governance issues” (World Bank, 2016). Under this KDC initiative, a free 4-week online course on ‘Localizing Poverty Reduction Targets’ was administered in 2015 by the Silliman University, the Central Philippine University and the University of Southeastern Philippines. The course intended to introduce best practice to local government units (LGUs) in terms of localising and realising poverty reduction targets. This service course also provided a broader exchange of knowledge among LGUs and various stakeholders in view of achieving local development in communities (Silliman University, 2016).

The Ateneo de Manila University also has an active immersion programme which allows students to join communities, to engage and instil among them the actuality of conditions confronted by the marginalised sectors. Advocacy work is highlighted in this programme where in addition to the immersion as “concretizing the situation of the poor in the lives of the students”, they are also able to give back to communities by being a “professionals-for-others” (ADMU, 2016). This immersion comes under the PRAXIS programme which requires fourth year students to involve in a two and half day -weekend immersion in selected communities.

In addition, the Ateneo de Zamboanga University School of Medicine has supported a number of initiatives that have helped improve health living conditions in communities. A significant drop in infant mortality rate has been documented (from 50 to 80/1000 in 1995 to 5-8/1000 in 2008) through various student-community programmes such as education for disease prevention, provision of latrines, infant vaccinations, and village waste management (University of Calgary, 2016). Other projects involve a collaborative approach as an
agenda to incorporate better community involvement, e.g., the construction of a lying-in centre for pregnant women which engaged the community in constructing the centre, where one litre plastic bottles with sand were used to build the walls of the centre. Initiatives like this not only help address basic health concerns of the community through university involvement but also provide “positive community engagement and tremendous community pride in finding practical solutions for its own problems” (University of Calgary, 2016)

4.4. Case study Thailand

In Thailand, some 74 percent of upper secondary students transition to the next level of education, adding to the 2.4 million students enrolled at one of the 300 HEIs in the country (Punyasavatsut, 2013). Free basic education, student-friendly loan programmes, generous tuition subsidies as well as increased capacity have paved the way to the expansion of higher education here. However, tertiary-level participation still varies quite substantially between the rich and poor and across geographical locations. According to the World Bank (2009), the enrolment gap between urban and rural students have increased from 15 percentage points in 2001–17 percentage points in 2005. Such gaps threaten to worsen income inequality and slow social mobility (Lathapipat, 2011, cited in Punyasavatsut, 2013). Another major concern that can exacerbate this situation further is the deteriorating school quality despite already huge spending – the education budget already accounts for 20 percent of the national budget (Punyasavatsut, 2013). Under greater public scrutiny, other issues have emerged – for example, an estimated 300,000 to several million children are left out from attending school (Jitcharoenkul, 2016; QLF, 2011). Many of these children live in the state of extreme poverty.

The healthy school program—built on a university-government-school-community-business collaboration network—have attempted to deal with some of the aforementioned issues, as well as host of others including its primary and root objective: to cultivate happy and healthy learners, families, schools, and communities (Erawan, 2015). Ten Rajabhat universities (teacher training institutions) have undertaken the five-year project in collaboration with the Secretariat Office of the Teachers Council of Thailand, Thai Health Promotion Foundation (ThaiHealth) and the Institute for Research on the Education System (ieres), along with a growing crop of 69 schools, 86 communities as well as numerous businesses (Baingern & Sampaothip, 2015; Saengpasa, 2015). One of the rural schools in northeast Thailand had involved students, teachers and parents in their decision to apply (which was successful) to be part of this network. The farming community helps the school with farming and building projects, while teachers work with students through problem-based learning sequences in doing learning activities such as building a tree house, cultivating a vegetable patch, or designing an energy-friendly solar project. The nearby Rajabhat University provides pedagogical support and a steady stream of teacher interns, who in turn, gain valuable classroom experience. The principal of the school report that the once perennial problem of truancy and drop-outs have diminished to a very low level. In another project in a vocational school, a jewellery maker and a vocational college coordinate for student interns to gain exposure and field experience in exchange for scholarships, boarding and a stipend (Saengpasa, 2015).

Other universities, such Burapha University, provide health education and services to the geriatric community. Faculty members as well as students work with community leaders, health care staffs and volunteers to facilitate activities such as physical education and exercise, technology usage education, rehabilitation services for the less abled, and home safety education (AUN USR&R Secretariat, 2011). Chiang Mai University (CMU), on the other hand, has projects to help the surrounding highland community in increasing crop productivity as well as improving fruits and vegetable preservation practices. Other than the benefit of exposure and experience to this real-world projects, students at CMU have also learned to understand and relate with the extended community around them.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The role of universities in ‘social responsibility’ as highlighted above through selected case studies in the ASEAN showed a variety of functions adopted by HEIs—from engaging communities and increasing capacity development, to greater regional and local advancement that equally promote sustainable practices. But despite the number of university cases presented, the lack of an overriding ‘social responsibility’ role in the HE sector of countries is apparent, apart from patchwork functions exhibited by individual universities in the region. Navigating through Boyer’s four frameworks of (i) discovery, (ii) integration, (iii) sharing and (iv) application of knowledge, three factors crucial to explaining the USR perspective in ASEAN HEIs are realised through the selected case studies reviewed namely, the impact of policy orientations in relevant HEIs as displayed in AUN USR’s framework, the broader contextual realities inherent in case study countries, and the need to engage ‘reflective practitioners’.

5.1. Policy orientations towards USR

The increasing neo-liberal orientation of the higher education sector, as exhibited for instance through the influence of university ranking systems, has equally instigated a greater call for HEIs to assume a ‘third role’ in community engagement and development (Barker, 2004; Sandmann, 2008). Related to the conventional university rankings system though probably not as anticipated, rankings in terms of social responsibility are also set to measure the impact of HEIs on this ‘third role’ (see for instance Q5, 2018). With this call for an enhanced democratisation of knowledge through civil engagement, the ASEAN through the AUN USR has also developed four frameworks which can guide respective HEIs to ensuring greater involvement and outreach in societies, these include: (i). Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services, (ii). University’s Governance and Administration; (iii). Community Involvement and (iv). Campus Life (AUN, 2010).

These four integral parts make up the central features of ASEAN’s initiative for greater USR sustainability, as exhibited in the selected case study institutions discussed earlier. This AUN USR agenda also overlaps with Boyer’s four frameworks though the AUN USR’s model on University’s Governance and Administration focuses more on organisational management of universities in terms of implementing USR, while the Community Involvement emphasis which aims to engage communities to “improve their standard of living, tackle local issues and help contribute to the positive impact in wider society” (AUN, 2010) also broadly covers the four dimensions of Boyer’s framework. The other two dimensions make up the essential features of HEIs where Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services focus on teaching and research mandates of HEIs, while the Campus Life covers “essentially about the livelihood of students and universities’ personnel during their time in the universities” relevant to USR programmes” (AUN, 2010).

Sifting through the case study institutions, one can see how each approach to USR links to both Boyer’s and the AUN USR’s frameworks, though largely on the sharing of knowledge component as illustrated in community education programmes, which is equivalent to AUN USR’s Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services (e.g. disaster risk comprehension workshops in Indonesia, health education awareness issues in the Philippines and geriatric health awareness in Thailand). On the one hand, the integration of knowledge can be seen through Indonesia’s UGM capacity building for the local community, and the application of knowledge through Malaysia’s Junior Doctor’s programme and Thailand’s Healthy School programme, while the discovery of knowledge is apparent in research intensive programmes like USM’s Centre for Global Sustainability Studies.

The table below features the corresponding frameworks of selected
HEIs in the ASEAN as relating to Boyer and the AUN USR (Table 1).

Anchoring the case study institutions’ programmes to Boyer’s framework, one would see a myriad of approaches towards introducing USR in higher education. Though the sharing of knowledge is most prevalent, a number of institutions have approached the theme through the ‘theory to practice’ orientation of Boyer’s application of knowledge. It is envisioned that as the ASEAN pushes for a more unified AEC, its Sociocultural Community agenda will further the prospects of a more engaged HE sector that will push community engagement as the standard.

5.2. Contextual realities and cultivating world 3 knowledge

This paper also highlights how various civic engagement agendas as revealed through the cases, reflect the contextual realities of the countries involved. For instance, in the Philippines where greater access to HE, and education broadly is given ‘social responsibility’ priority, where HE access and completion is equated to wider national development. Engaging communities for greater capacity building in the case of the Philippines, as with others, show involvement with communities in the appeal to provide basic services that are otherwise lacking or needed in local communities. Boyer’s framework on the scholarship of engagement (1996) highlights this symbiotic role of involvement where there is need to create a connection between HE and communities while “enriching the quality of life for all of us” (p.33). He argues further the challenge besetting HEIs in this involvement, where resources are allocated to respond to the most pressing ethical, civic and social needs of communities (p.32). Of course, one can argue that a university’s social responsibility pursuit is only as good as its policy orientations in terms of the basic quality of life and development where there is fit regional and local development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Higher Education Institution</th>
<th>USR Programme/s</th>
<th>AUN- USR Framework</th>
<th>Boyer’s Framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogor Agricultural University</td>
<td>Spins offs and local businesses creation</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services</td>
<td>Application of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universitas Gadjah Mada</td>
<td>Workshops on disaster risk comprehension</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services</td>
<td>Discovery, integration and sharing of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universitas Indonesia</td>
<td>Disaster mitigation and outreach</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services</td>
<td>Sharing of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Malaya</td>
<td>Junior Doctor’s Programme, UM Cares</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services</td>
<td>Sharing and application of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universiti Sains Malaysia</td>
<td>Centre for Global Sustainability Studies</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services</td>
<td>Discovery, sharing and integration of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of the Philippines</td>
<td>Socialised tuition system, University’s Governance and Administration</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services</td>
<td>Sharing of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siliman University, the Central University of the Philippines and University of Southeastern Philippines</td>
<td>Free access online course on ‘localizing poverty reduction targets’</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services</td>
<td>Sharing of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ateneo de Manila</td>
<td>Immersion programme with the local community</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services</td>
<td>Sharing and application of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ateneo de Zamboanga</td>
<td>Health education programmes, construction of health facilities with the community</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services</td>
<td>Sharing and application of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajabhat universities</td>
<td>Healthy schools programme</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services</td>
<td>Sharing, integration and application of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burapha University</td>
<td>Health education programmes</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services</td>
<td>Sharing of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiang Mai University</td>
<td>Sharing crop productivity and preservation practices to local community</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning, Research and Academic Services</td>
<td>Sharing, integration and application of knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
to sustainable practices.

The need to connect academics and HEIs more in community involvement by promoting ‘reflective practitioners’ (Schon in Boyer, 1996) is also advocated where it creates a course of moving “theory to practice, and from practice back to theory” (p.27), thus making theory more relevant and realistic. The teacher training (Rajabhat) institutes in Thailand programme on ‘healthy schools’ show active involvement of theory to practice (and vice versa) where teacher trainees and trainers involve themselves in actual classroom teaching settings that promote the purposes of the community schools. This model creates substantial prospect in successfully integrating marginalised communities in mainstream education schemes in the country.

As the aforesaid model matures, it can become a model for an advanced symbiotic, collaborative knowledge community where knowledge building occurs through dynamic interactions between various stakeholders between the university and the larger community. Through Bereiter’s (2002) epistemological lens, one can refer to this collaborative process as knowledge building. This approach is derived from Popper’s (1972) distinctions between World 1 (physical reality), World 2 (the mental world) and World 3 (the cultural world). For Bereiter, World 3 includes knowledge objects as well as conceptual artefacts such as man-made thoughts and ideas manifesting in public and cultural settings, still subject to conjecture and negotiation. World 3 involves knowledge acquired in the layers of cultural history, such as contents and ideas in science or farming. These layers provide the basis for developing expertise and unique knowledge building (discovery, sharing and integration of knowledge), as members of an extended community collaboratively deal with issues using embedded knowledge objects that carries both cultural knowledge, method and practices (application of knowledge). Some of ASEAN’s most pressing issues—economic and social inequality, environmental degradation, and human security—can benefit significantly from such communal collaborations. For such collaborations to occur, HEIs must lead in the creation of a conducive sphere of activity to facilitate a broader ecosystem of Boyer’s discovery, integration, sharing and application of knowledge.

IPB’s agriculture-based entrepreneurial and research-based model in Indonesia, the Ateneo de Zamboanga’s community capacity building practices in the Philippines, as well as the Rajabhat universities’ healthy school initiative in Thailand, among others, exhibit excellent potential as vibrant spheres of activity. This also highlights the application of knowledge agenda in Boyer’s model and where such spheres create opportunities for the human mind (specifically, the minds) of stakeholders in the symbiotic community—“for understanding them, contributing to them, participating in them; and for bringing them to bear on the first world” (Popper, 1972, p. 156). These collaborative workspaces—bringing together experts from universities and experts from the broader community, as well as their respective problems, experiences, contexts and mental representations—can produce new knowledge. Real world and theoretical problems can be discussed and shared, worked on, critiqued, and improved—which concurs with the sharing and integrating of knowledge which is crucial in addressing existing societal problems. Some of these issues are aptly referred to as wicked problems. For instance, the transboundary haze problem (caused by large-scale open burning during the dry season) involves a heady mix of stakeholders, including farmers and non-farming citizens, national and local bureaucracies, NGOs and businesses. Universities, with its trans-disciplinary capacities, can play a significant role in creating the necessary workspaces for these wicked problems to be resolved.

Ultimately, this symbiotic relationship creates a unique value for the university as well as the larger community. The knowledge building in these collaborative work spaces can be quite unique when compared to the learning processes we often associate with classroom experiences. With common classroom experiences, the epistemic change often takes place at an individual level but knowledge building brings about epistemical advances at the communal level (Bereiter, 2002). Despite the tensions between institutional rewards and engagement, realising such requires “answering the difficult questions about how to engage communities, and taking the risks necessary to make it happen” (Ward 2003, p. 145). When HEIs engage with the broader community at this level within such spaces, opportunities for knowledge advances for stakeholders involved can be significant, where HE is “not just more programmes but also a larger purpose, a larger sense of mission, a larger clarity of direction (…)” (p.33). In this process, not only will social responsibility and sustainability become an essential part of ASEAN HEIs, but it will also become integral to the broader communities.

References


AUNURS & Secretariat. 2011. AUN USR&R: University Social Responsibility and Sustainability – A Collection of Good Practices. ASEAN University Network (AUN), Bangkok


