



GOOD PRACTICES IN STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIETY

UNIKAT: FROM THE IDEA TO THE FOUNDATION

Student Engagement with Society through Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Fostering Student Engagement through AI-driven Qualitative Quality Assurance Practices
A Project Developed by:



UNIVERSITY
OF TWENTE.



MCAST



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Project: Fostering Student Engagement through AI-driven Qualitative Quality Assurance Practices

Consortium Partners

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Title: UNIKAT: from the Idea to the Foundation. Student Engagement with Society through Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Organizations: UniKasselTransfer, University of Kassel.

One liner – essence of the case study: UNIKAT supports the interaction among students, researchers, business, industry, and society, enhancing activities in teaching and learning, research, knowledge transfer and entrepreneurial ventures.

Country: Germany.

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Summary: The University of Kassel promotes student and university members' community and social engagement through its organizational structure UNIKAT, a central label articulating services in start-up funding, technology transfer, patent management, career service, further education, dual studies, civic engagement, and alumni services. The aim is to support students to become more entrepreneurial thinking and acting throughout the university since the programme covers all the faculties. This organizational structure supports the interaction among students, researchers, business, industry, and society, enhancing activities in teaching and learning, research, knowledge transfer and entrepreneurial ventures.

About the Qual-AI-ty case studies: This case study is part of a Compendium of Good Practices in student engagement with society. The cases provide an overview of inspiring initiatives, projects, and programmes that higher education institutions are undertaking in Europe and that offer opportunities for students to engage with their local context while addressing societal challenges. The aim of the compendium is to collect information about the current conditions of university student engagement with society through various voluntary and non-voluntary activities which are creating betterment of the societies in Europe.

OVERVIEW

1. Introduction

The University of Kassel is a comprehensive public HEI located in the city of Kassel, state of Hessen, centre of Germany. Founded in 1971, it has the ambition of driving innovative concepts for practice-oriented teaching and learning as well as interdisciplinary work. The University of Kassel has a profile that mixes fields of expertise in nature, technology, culture, and society. As of the winter semester of 2019, the university held 25,103 students spread across 11 departments, 4 Scientific centres and 8 Research and Competence centres. The university is a key stakeholder in the development of the northern Hessen region and attracts students and scholars from across Germany and abroad.

According to a study on the economic importance of the university for the region, about 10,500 jobs and a turnover of 465 million euros can be traced back to spin-offs from the university and the regional need it creates (Rudolph, 2011). In 2013, it was awarded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy as a Start-up University, an award that promotes universities with a pronounced culture of fostering entrepreneurship in Germany. The university received two million euros from the federal government, plus extensions and additional funding from the State of Hesse. This allowed the university to promote the Science Park Kassel GmbH, founded in 2014, a place for interaction of academia, state, and business. For 2017, the University of Kassel is recognized as a model of entrepreneurial university due to the role it plays in the regional economy (Hartung, 2017)

2. Background Information

The value proposition of driving innovative concepts for practice-oriented teaching and learning and its strategy concept of entrepreneurial thinking and acting in teaching, research, and transfer, make university-society interactions play a central role in the institution. The collaboration with external stakeholders from the community and the region is vital for University of Kassel. In this way, and through the wide range of entrepreneurial activities it carries out, it has built a track record and a main role as a core supplier for talent and innovation.

The university strategy is channelled through the UNIKAT brand that groups services supporting students to become intrapreneurial thinking and acting throughout the

different faculties of the university. Students are in the centre of the services. They can participate under the different sub-brands of UNIKAT:

- UNIKAT Ideas Competition
- UNIKAT Science
- UNIKAT Social Innovations
- UNIKAT Crowdfunding
- UNIKAT Mentoring and Incubator
- UNIKAT Scholarships and Funding Programs
- UNIKAT Rooms for Founding Teams
- UNIKAT Education Courses and UNIKAT Start-Up School
- UNIKAT Patent Management

Additionally, the University of Kassel offer a programme in service learning, that provides the opportunities for students to engage in specific educational projects with the local communities of North Hessen. UNIKAT offers opportunities for students to engage with the regional innovation ecosystem through the key role the university plays in the local economy and building in the close relation with the businesses and industry. Through idea competitions, social innovations, consulting activities, start-up support, and entrepreneurship, they guarantee and effective student engagement with the society generating innovation to face societal challenges.

UNIKAT started as a contest of ideas in the early 2000's and then it articulates diverse initiatives that consolidated the initiative as a broad university brand. UNIKAT is strongly intertwined with entrepreneurship, knowledge and technology transfer from the university to the business, government, and societal sector. All the university transfer activities are articulated within the university's knowledge transfer body UniKasselTransfer, which is also under the UNIKAT brand. Additionally, the university runs a Research and Teaching Centre for Entrepreneurial Thinking and Acting (Forschungs- und Lehrzentrum für Unternehmerisches Denken und Handeln, Fludh). This centre oversees integrating entrepreneurial thinking and acting in teaching, research, and knowledge transfer at an institutional level, that means it serves for the university's students and researchers.

3. Aims and Motivations

As a Start-Up University, it is necessary to foster close ties with relevant actors from industry and business. Therefore, the university has within its units an Entrepreneurs Council that provides staff, students, and graduates with insights, cooperation, and consultancy on business related matters when they want to start a new venture. This Council consists of members of more experienced start-ups in the University's Science Park as well as from other well-established companies in the region. This strategy makes part of the university strategic orientation towards entrepreneurship and engagement with the regional economic development. So, the intuition acts as a catalyst for endogenous development through the creation of communications channels, linkages, incubators, and technological parks that set the conditions for economic growth, social development, and creative disruptions.

The University of Kassel proposes in its mission to foster "open-mindedness and a sense of responsibility in the face of societal and environmental challenges" and "sustainability and applicability, professional orientation and personal development" (University of Kassel, 2007). Both statements reflect social engagement and applicability as the pillars of the mission. These values aim to both develop well-rounded personalities and to contribute to societal challenges through the positive impact of higher education in its context.

The University of Kassel aims at making entrepreneurial-oriented education widespread across all their departments, not exclusively for the faculties of business and engineering (normally the ones seen as the most connected to industry and entrepreneurship), therefore, its Research and Teaching Centre for Entrepreneurial Thinking and Acting advertises its events to all departments, arranging contacts for co-operation among departments and profit- or non-profit organisations. The university provides guidance on how to develop external relationships to all departments and appeals to academic freedom and proactivity so that departments can also be free to arrange external contracts on their own.

Given all its aims, the university has decided to integrate its actions in the three focuses:

Education: by establishing an offer of more than 56 curricular courses in entrepreneurship, involving academics and practitioners. The subjects include innovation management case studies, communication skills and applied project management. The courses are complemented with a broad variety of events in entrepreneurship education through its Research and Teaching Centre for

Entrepreneurial Thinking and Acting, under the UNIKAT Education and the Start-Up School. The aim of these activities is to strengthen entrepreneurial skills in project-based and practice-oriented activities, commonly involving external experts and stakeholders. Students who take part in these events can also opt for receiving ECTS credits for their study, depending on their curricula.

Research: The main university body in charge here is the Research and Teaching Centre for Entrepreneurial Thinking and Acting, which promotes interdisciplinary cooperation of researchers internally and externally. It aims to establish an overall university research profile in entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education. The university fosters strong linkages with research-intensive companies on the region to develop joint research projects and contract research. These connections also serve as a path for student's internships. So, students may also connect to society through entrepreneurial research activities.

Knowledge Transfer: The University of Kassel considers their activities of Transfer as a core university function integrated holistically with teaching and research. Its transfer office UniKasselTransfer has in-house experienced specialists in product development, start-up advice, and start-up financing that support its members in start-up consulting, further education, research evaluation, service learning, patent management, career service, alumni service, and a dual study offer for enterprises. Despite knowledge transfer could be considered as a university-industry interaction, there is room also for students to take part in these interactions with external stakeholders from the perspective of knowledge and technology transfer.

4. Stakeholders

Due to the entrepreneurial efforts and the role the University of Kassel plays in the regional economy and entrepreneurial ecosystem, they have involved a wide range of internal and external stakeholders in the activities. We classified the stakeholders as internal and external.

Internal stakeholders

- **Academic community:** composed by students, researchers, academics and administrative staff that beyond the typical activities of teaching, learning, and research are interested in playing a role in the local economy, regional entrepreneurial ecosystem and generating economic and social benefits.

External stakeholders

- **Strategic partners:** a varied number of external organizations and bodies are involved and relevant for numerous entrepreneurial activities that contribute to the overall university's entrepreneurial profile. Among the most relevant external stakeholders stand:
 - The Entrepreneurs' Association Northern Hesse (Unternehmerverband Nordhessen): this association supports the university's entrepreneurial activities materially and non-materially. It contributes to funding UniKasselTransfer's incubator and the university's idea competitions, among other key initiatives.
 - The JUNIOR programme: a nation-wide programme for promoting economic and financial education of school children, including business start-ups, operated by the German Economic Institute. It also provides important insights for educating the next generation of teachers, being the University of Kassel one of the largest institutions in Germany educating vocational school teachers.
 - The German Association for International Co-operation (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, GIZ): this co-operation is important for entrepreneurship education projects that the university runs in other countries such as one that it runs in Kyrgyzstan.
 - The Kassel Savings Bank (Kasseler Sparkasse): one of the university's most important business partners and the most important financial partner, having it accompanied the funding of two thirds of the start-ups from the university
- **The Entrepreneurs Council (Unternehmer Rat):** this council includes 20 entrepreneurs from the region, mainly from small and medium-sized companies from various industries but also from the larger companies located in the region. They provide the university's start-ups with consulting, coaching, access to their established sales channels, and funding as business angels.
- **The University Board (Hochschulrat):** It is the formal component of business involvement within the university's organizational structure, and it has the mission of supporting the university's development, to provide guidance on demands from employers and to promote the use of the university's scientific insights and artistic achievements. It is comprised for up to ten members from business, science, and arts.



- **Regional Non-Profit Organizations and Public Institutions:** these organizations can benefit of the joint work with the university through the transference of knowledge and the students' indicatives that provide solutions, new projects, crowdfunding, consultancy, and projection to the future for the effective fulfilment of their mission.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Innovative Inputs

Among the innovative tangible inputs, the University of Kassel has implemented for supporting its entrepreneurial activities stand out their dedicated spaces and facilities for innovation, such as the Science Park, the Incubator, and the Rooms for Founding Teams. Those spaces allow UNIKAT to have an institutionalized and sustainable presence as the meeting point between internal and external stakeholders

The University's Science Park is located on campus, and it is operated together with the City of Kassel as the other shareholder. It consists of a more than 6,000 square meters of administrative offices, technical rooms and laboratories that play the role of a start-up and innovation centre dedicated to creating linkages and to develop a regional ecosystem of entrepreneurship among the private and public sectors. The Park also hosts an "IdeaLab", which is a centre of co-creation for teams of students, researchers, founders, or businesspeople to think creatively and generate new ideas for projects, products, or services. So, these physical inputs aim to create complex dynamics between diverse sectors and stakeholders and open the possibilities for students to engage in these dynamics.

Most of the university's transfer-related units are in the Science Park: UniKasselTransfer, the Management School UNIKIMS, that offers extra-occupational education in business administration, as well as the GINo mbH (The society of innovation of Nordhessen), that markets patents and runs a patent information centre. Additionally, around 40 enterprises and companies are as well located in the Science Park, most of them being university's spin offs. Regarding the University's Incubator, it has as main tasks to give start-up consulting, the management of the Entrepreneurs Council, and the development of innovation and entrepreneurship-related events such as the annual idea competition. Hence, the heart of this ecosystem is the innovations and entrepreneurship based on knowledge exploitation.

2. Strategies and Activities

Thanks to the combined results, both of its strategic vision of entrepreneurial education and research and the physical and non-physical assets, the university has strategically oriented its mission towards achieving its entrepreneurial goals. At the same time, the University of Kassel facilitates opportunities for their students and staff to take part in

innovative activities with the external environment and the wider society through different strategies:

Courses and academic curricula: the university's wide range of entrepreneurial curricular offer provides students with the opportunity of participating in real-world projects in collaboration with external organizations and businesses, subject-oriented service learning and key competence-oriented service learning. These activities can also lead to student internships and to students' new ventures and start-ups.

Voluntary social engagement: for those who prefer to engage outside of the formal curriculum, at the Kassel Volunteer Centre students can engage and can determine the content and scope themselves. Students can use the Centre's engagement finder to find suitable non-profit organizations with whom they can connect according to their interests. Moreover, there are numerous student initiatives recognized by the University of Kassel and associations in the city and region that are happy to receive volunteer support. The university is constantly available to help and advise newly emerging initiatives.

The Science Park as a crucial hub for innovative activities: this park provides opportunities related to students' interaction with the external organizational ecosystem. There, the Incubator and the IdeaLab play an important role in supporting their initiatives. Additionally, they also have crowdfunding services under the UNIKAT brand. In fact, UNIKAT crowdfunding was the first crowdfunding platform in Germany established by a university.

Enhancement of the involvement of the students and staff in the region's public life: some examples of these initiatives are the university's participation in "Documenta", an international arts exhibition that takes place in Kassel, every five years, in which the university plays a central role. The university also organizes events that serve as networking hubs between students and external experts. An example of this is the get-together they organize every first Tuesday of the month, where people from external business gather at the Science Park to participate and share their experiences. They have developed activities such as the "Failure Night", an event in which experienced businesspeople share their learnings from having failed in the past.

Involvement to mitigate the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic: the focus has been in projects that require special technical expertise that the University of Kassel has at its disposal. Many projects such as home-schooling support through the Department for Practical School Studies at the University of Kassel have been running continuously since spring 2020. The Corona counselling hotline, which is supervised

by psychology students on a voluntary basis, was relaunched in December 2020 to respond to the growing demand. The more recent ones are the Engagement Week held in May 2021, where students present their initiatives via Zoom.

3. Coordination with the Target Groups

The university's communication with their target groups for cooperation and collaboration happens through their main coordinating bodies for entrepreneurial initiatives, such as UniKasselTransfer, the Research and Teaching Centre for Entrepreneurial Thinking and Acting, their Entrepreneurs Council, or the corresponding body. This is with regards to its formal bodies.

Informally, the university promotes and encourages entrepreneurial actions and proactivity throughout all their departments, therefore, it is expected that some individual initiatives may not be fully mapped.

4. Deliverable Outputs

Without doubt, the creation of societal-impactful projects, new ventures and start-ups are established among the principal expected outputs of the university's entrepreneurial and collaboration initiatives. Since they started their activities, they have built a track record of success in this regard. Additionally, another expected deliverable is the creation of more joint projects with society and community organizations, this can happen in research as well as in teaching.

5. Intangible Outputs

Among the intangible expected outcomes, it is the enhancement of their student's learning experience, as well as the differential development of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge that will positively affect their student's employment-readiness, whether they will become entrepreneurs or be a part of a company. The university plays an important role in the context by socializing the students with the local actors and show them the variety of opportunities for employment or the possible stakeholders for their future start-ups.

It is also worth noting the student initiatives as an important intangible output of the university's society-oriented approach. Currently, there are more than 30 voluntary

student-led initiatives for societal contribution. The university provide recognition and opens the possibility to connect with other students or even with external partners.

From the side of what the university receives from their collaboration with the community, one key outcome is the constant feedback for improvement regarding their academic curricula and educational offer. It ensures the programs are updated and aligned to real-world and the societal needs. So, the academic programs surpass the boundary of the intuition and find its applicability in the local context, with the pertinent local actors.

EVALUATION AND MONITORING

1. Strategical Initiatives for Evaluation & Monitoring

UNIKAT implements diverse indicators and evaluation due to the disperse nature of the various activities the structure continuously develops. Although general cross-sectional key performance indicators could be an ideal, they also neglect the totally different focus of the initiatives. It could be pointed out as the key performance indicators the self-efficacy and team-work skills that the diverse initiatives develop. And this general idea of indicators is related to the personal and professional growth of the students' abilities and skills, which is one of the pillars of the university.

The public funding component of the organization requires them to have quantitative indicators tracking number of participants, seminars, workshops, or outputs related to patents and start-ups. Nevertheless, the indicators related to the scope, outputs and impact of each initiative totally depend on the programme. This allows great flexibility and openness for creativity and continuous improvement without hard constraints.

2. Impacts of the Outputs

UNIKAT and its aim of supporting knowledge-based start-ups with an intense exploitation of knowledge of students and staff has a great impact in the regional ecosystem. It is well recognized and documented by local and national media that the university provides human talent, ideas, technology and support for innovation and entrepreneurship. The involvement of the regional private and public organizations has brought funding for buildings and allowed external actors to take part in diverse activities such as education, research, transfer, sciences, contests, etc. So, the university has constructed its role as an important regional actor for the economic and social development.

The institution has created a network allowing the interchange of knowledge and opportunities for the diverse regional actors, from the academic, private, and public sector. These external interactions guarantee the fulfilment of the educational and research mission with a focus in local impact.

3. Success Factors

The first success factor identified is the university management commitment to strategically orient the institution to play a role in the regional economic ecosystem through a focus in entrepreneurship. This has led the institution to define an identity and clear goals orienting the behaviours of the different bodies. The implementation of an entrepreneurial focus takes advantage on the young profile of the university that detached it from the traditional role of academic research and allows to identify it with the dynamics of the regional economic and social ecosystems.

The second success factor is the hands-on approach to entrepreneurship. The university has attracted hands-on professors and researchers interested in entrepreneurship and innovation that in most of the cases relate to the local ecosystem. Beside the institutional support structures, the people constitute the pillar for the success of the implemented approach.

4. Lessons Learned

One of the main lessons learnt is the non-linearity of the entrepreneurship and innovation processes. Despite the design of specific trajectories for entrepreneurs, the reality is that interested people jump into different stages of the diverse services. So, it is necessary to have the capacity of setting a strong foundation, but also having the connections to supply diverse requirements that sometimes are not even envisioned in the services provided.

Also, facing the traditional conception that sees entrepreneurship as a pathway of employment instability is a hard issue. Students are surrounded of the family and contextual pressures to enter a traditional employment path. This relegates entrepreneurship as a stage in the student life. Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness of the pathways for entrepreneurs and the demand of intrapreneurial skills in the traditional job market.

SUPPORTIVE AND INFLUENCING ASPECTS

1. Major Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths	Weaknesses
The visible UNIKAT has inside the institution and outside within the regional entrepreneurial, business, industry, not-for-profit and public sectors.	Collaboration among the different initiatives is not always given due to the different scopes of the one.
Alignment of UNIKAT services to support the strategic vision towards entrepreneurship and innovation.	Difficulties for structuring a business or entrepreneurial hub. UNIKAT already has the pathways, but the reality is that people jump into different stages and the results are more diverse than expected.
High capacity for attracting private and public funding.	The entrepreneurial mindset generates conflicts with the traditional employment pathways among the alumni.
Interdisciplinary and cross-departmental strategy.	Complexity of developing and entrepreneurial and engaged mission and still having to meet the academic standards focused on traditional research indicators.
Active involvement of external actors that have institutionalized spaces inside the university.	
Leading and active role in the Region's economic and societal development.	
Budget allocation for entrepreneurial and society engagement activities, as well as for entrepreneurial-oriented physical infrastructure.	

2. Further Challenges

The most visible challenges that UNIKAT and the university mission focused on entrepreneurship and engagement face are:

1. the focus of the academic world and the policy requirements on traditional research indicators of numbers of publications and citations as a measure for the success of a university. This hinders the visibility and acknowledgement of the academics working in entrepreneurship and engagement because they also need to fulfil the research requirements.
2. The demands and pressures for developing bigger numbers of patents and start-ups and make them sustainable in time.
3. The develop and implementation of an approach that allows individuals to bring ideas into light and implement them. In fact, the ideas for knowledge-based entrepreneurship do not naturally abound and the interest across the society is not extended. Hence, it is necessary to work from the basics, constructing an educational project that develops the entrepreneurial and innovative mindset allowing individuals to learn how to become entrepreneurs.
4. The transitory conception of the start-up culture. There is a culture that see start-ups culture as a stage in the student life before jumping in the traditional job market due to the conception that start-ups culture is a path of instability. So, after the university students abandon their ideas and make a transition to a traditional job market. Anyhow, is still advantageous to have an entrepreneurial mindset in the workplace.
5. The development of the intrapreneur skills, entrepreneurship within the employment. This will be a key competence that will enables employees to effectively tackle problems.
6. The big fish eats the smaller dynamic. Some of the promising start-ups began as small successful businesses and then the big companies buy them. Hence, it is necessary to integrate start-ups in an ecosystem of networks and support that allow them to blossom without having to sell the initiatives to big companies since the beginning.

MORE INFORMATION

1. Sustainability Factors

Among the main factors that contribute to the sustainability of the UNIKAT structure inside the University of Kassel stand out

- The University of Kassel strategic missional commitment to play a key role in the economic and social fields of the local context.
- The strategic vision towards involvement with the society and the local economic ecosystem for offering entrepreneurship education and guide the effective fulfilment of the third mission.
- The track record of success in society and industry involvement which makes the university a referent of innovation in the region.
- Budget allocation from diverse sources and high capacities for attracting provide and public (regional and national) funding.
- Investment in society-engagement and innovation-oriented infrastructure (Science Park) with participation of the private and public sectors.
- Close relationships with key external actors from the region: business, industry, NGOs, and local communities.
- Academic community interest in engagement with the local society through entrepreneurship and innovation to generate positive changes.

2. Transferability

All they key initiatives under the umbrella of UNIKAT constitute are susceptible of replication in other higher education intuitions, in fact, most of the intuitions already offer most of these services. The innovative element is the articulation under a university brand, UNIKAT, ant the direct articulation with the external environment. The general focus of UNIKAT, as its moto “from the idea to the foundation”, is the entrepreneurial thinking and acting, by supporting and developing an entrepreneurial and locally engaged mindset and it is supported by the key units:

1. **Patent Management, Innovation Networks and Technology Transfer:** advisory services for patent administration. Its focus is on inventions, property rights, software, and their marketing efforts, as well as on regional innovation networks, research collaborations and technology transfer.

2. **Career Service:** The unit supports the students' transition to the labour, as well as provides advice, consultancy, events, and coordination of cooperation between university and companies.
3. **Continuing Education:** part-time and post-professional learning services, as well as in-service scientific training, through practice-oriented, interdisciplinary, and research-based continuing education courses.
4. **Social Commitment:** cooperation with initiatives, non-profit organizations, and public institutions, mostly from the region through the integration of engagement in teaching (service learning), as the main focus.
5. **Germany Scholarship:** Scholarships for talented students supported by regional companies, foundations, and private individuals eager to maximize the potential of talented students.
6. **Guest Student Programme:** The programme offers interested citizens opportunities for part-time and post-professional learning with a wide range of digital offers from regular teaching.
7. **Dual Study Programme:** educational pathway offers for young academics who are already familiar with the practical experience on site.

3. Awards and Recognition

University of Kassel received in 2013 the recognition of a "Start-Up University" from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy.

Additionally, local and national media reported the university key role in the region as an example in Germany:

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4. Links

- UNIKAT: From the idea to the foundation: <https://www.uni-kassel.de/einrichtung/ukt/unikat-von-der-idee-zur-gruendung>

- UniKasselTransfer: <https://www.uni-kassel.de/einrichtung/ukt/startseite/>

5. Contact Persons

- **Dr. Oliver Fromm**, Acting Head of UniKasselTransfer (kanzler(at)uni-kassel.de)
- **Jens Behrmann**, Deputy Head of the University of KasselTransfer (behrmann(at)uni-kassel.de)
- **Petra Stegmann**, Assistant to the head of UniKasselTransfer (stegmann(at)uni-kassel.de)



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