

University Social Responsibility (USR) in the Global Context: An Overview of Literature

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Abstract: Higher education institutions worldwide have begun to embrace sustainability issues and engage their campuses and communities in such efforts, which have led to the development of integrity and ethical values in these organizations and their relationships with stakeholders. This study provides a literary review of the concept of University Social Responsibility (USR) and sustainability programs worldwide, grouped into eight research streams: conceptual framework, strategic planning and USR, educating on USR, spreading USR, reporting and USR, evaluation of USR, barriers and accelerators and case studies. The aforementioned research streams served as a context to explore best practices in sustainability on a global basis.

Key Words: university social responsibility, social responsibility, sustainability, higher education

Introduction

Higher education institutions worldwide have begun to embrace sustainability issues and engage their campuses and communities in such efforts, which have led to the development of integrity and ethical values in these organizations and their relationships with stakeholders. This study provides an overview of the literature available on the concept of University Social Responsibility (USR) and sustainability programs worldwide, grouped into eight research streams. Furthermore, one of our goals has been to choose examples that we believe are innovative in their

approach, offer a fresh perspective in best practices and provide insight into sustainability, social responsibility and ethics, including geographies less represented in USR-related research and literature. In both higher education and corporate settings, social responsibility is taught under a range of terms, including business ethics, corporate responsibility, corporate governance, social accountability, business and sustainability, etc. (Murphy, Sharma, and Moon 2012).

The qualitative research carried out as part of this study allowed for eight basic aspects on which the research was structured to emerge: conceptual framework, strategic planning and USR, educating on USR, spreading USR, reporting and USR, evaluation of USR, barriers and accelerators and case studies. The concept of Social Responsibility in the context of the University setting is presented through the application of a descriptive methodology and reviewed in accordance with each one of the aspects analyzed, taking into consideration their development, in order to reach conclusions in which several themes and insights emerged, providing orientation to higher education institutions.

Research Stream No. 1—Conceptual Framework

This stream sets the stage for the current state of the concept of USR. A deeper analysis of the laws and documentation being developed in this area, such as the reports on the progress of educational institutions which adhere to the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), whose mission is to “inspire and champion responsible management education, research and thought leadership globally” (UN Global Compact 2011), will provide insight on the aspects of the different sustainability management systems that are being developed for higher education institutions. In his paper entitled “Institutional Assessment Tools for Sustainability in Higher Education: Strengths, Weaknesses, and Implications for Practice and Theory.” Michael Shriberg (2002) provides a comprehensive analysis of eleven cross-institutional assessment tools, including: the National Wildlife Federation’s (NWF) “State of the Campus Environment”; University Leaders for a Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire; Auditing Instrument for Sustainability in Higher Education (AISHE); Higher Education 21’s Sustainability Indicators (UK); Higher Education Funding Council for England’s Environmental Report and Workbook; Greening Campuses; Campus Ecology; Environmental Performance Survey; New Jersey (US) Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability’s Campus Sustainability Selected Indicators Snapshot and Guide; the World Resources Institute’s “Grey Pinstripes with Green Ties” Business School Survey; and the Campus Consortium for Environmental Excellence’s Environmental Management

System Self-Assessment Checklist. Until recently, the aforementioned were the references in sustainability management systems in the context of USR. Nowadays, the emphasis has shifted away from such pioneers and is now focused on systems such as STARS, The College Sustainability Report Card, and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), to be analyzed in further detail in Research Stream No. 5—Reporting and USR.

Of the numerous definitions of USR which have been published in recent years, as pronounced during the AUSJAL¹ conference in Caracas, Venezuela, François Vallaeys's definition of "a policy of ethical quality in the activities of the university community (students, lecturers, administrative staff), through responsible management of the educational, cognitive, labour and environmental impact of the university, in a participative dialogue with society to promote sustainable human development" (Vallaeys 2007) has gained increasing acceptance and credibility. As detailed in their step-by-step guide to USR, Vallaeys et al. (2009) outline a conceptual framework that encompasses four steps:

1. Commitment—this reflects the commitment on behalf of the University with the project, mission and values of the institution.
2. Self-diagnosis—the quantitative and qualitative tools required for the diagnosis of the four key areas of the university (organizational management, education, knowledge and research and social participation).
3. Compliance—verification of the results of the diagnosis against the university's mission and planning of areas of improvement and executive social responsibility projects.
4. Accountability—ideas for the evaluation and communication of the results of improvement projects in the institution.

It is precisely in this fourth step where reporting to stakeholders and dialogue takes place. In their guide, Vallaeys et al. (2009) refer to "stakeholders" as a term that encompasses a wide range of individuals, such as: non-teaching staff, teaching and research staff, authorities, students, providers, graduates, recruiters, competitors, local communities, partner organizations and public/governmental entities. Shriberg (2002) reaffirms the need for sustainability tools to thus be comprehensible to a broad range of stakeholders, requiring "mechanisms for reporting that are verifiable and lucid."

Having defined RSU as it has come to be known today, it is important to highlight the significant emphasis placed on environmental management and how this

is commonly confused with the concept of social responsibility. This was proven in a Spanish study which analyzed the sustainability and social responsibility reports of universities (Larrán, López, and Andrades 2010), in which their previous finding of a lack of references for the creation of such USR reports was referenced, further exacerbated by these indicators being limited to environmental performance (Velázquez, Munguia, and Sánchez 2005). While one objective (Larrán et al. 2010) was to lessen the reliance on environmental management, in their conclusions they recognized that the majority of the findings obtained are similar to previous USR studies carried out in which the focus is almost exclusively on the environmental dimension. The environmental focus, intertwined with social responsibility, was found to reoccur across cultures on a global basis.

More specifically, in Spain, it was at the Conference of Presidents of Spanish Universities (CRUE 2003), where the framework was developed and established for environmental quality, sustainable development and risk prevention. The objective of these regulations was to develop more efficient operations within the network, thus maximizing the efforts of the universities on an individual and joint basis.

The investment in education has become undoubtedly one of the most important priorities of advanced societies. The strategic role that universities and public research organizations play in the creation and transmission of knowledge is vital for the transformation of the current productive system to a society based on more competitive knowledge and higher rates of wellbeing. In aspects such as education, research and innovation, this strategic role is fundamental when it comes to the way they act over a territory and have influence on three levels: a local/regional level given the location of the university in a specific region, on a national level as an institution with influence over the entire territory, and finally those that strive to position themselves on a global level, with impact on aspects such as internationalization and excellence.

The creation of the European Space for Higher Education (ESHE), in which forty-six European countries currently participate, and the European Research Area (ERA), which was founded with the Lisbon Declaration, are the best examples of the increasing emphasis on achieving a change in the economic and social paradigm that societies require, without renouncing cultural peculiarities and aspects that differentiate each country and territory. In some countries more than ten years ago, a profound reform was carried out, along with modernization of the system, in which the following aspects took on critical importance: the improvement of university governance systems, financing and an increased level of university autonomy coupled with systems for accountability and efficient

management, management systems to attract more agile and efficient personnel, thus guaranteeing transparency and equality of opportunities, and processes and systems that allow for the optimization of research.

Research Stream No. 2—Strategic Planning and USR

This stream analyzes the social dimension of the Bologna Process and how it should be considered from a strategic perspective and an overview of the Spanish *University Strategy 2015* (Ministerio de Educación 2010), finalizing by discussing how the mission of University is defined in many cases by USR, yet the tools for internal control do not evidence the connection between the key factors for Social Responsibility and the degree of accomplishment of the University's mission.

One of the objectives is to define a mid to long-term international policy that allows Spanish universities to take advantage of scalability factors and which favor diversification and coordination of objectives, increasing the attraction and visibility of Spanish universities. This involves one of the objectives of the Foundation for Foreign Promotion of Spanish Universities. It is equally necessary to respond to the desire of the Spanish university to integrate itself within the framework of the ESHE, on the basis of the Bologna Declaration. It will be necessary to delve deeper into the strategic role of the Spanish University as a fundamental central theme in the European Space (García Suárez 2006) based on knowledge (ESHE and ERA) and the Ibero-American Knowledge Space.

In “Social Responsibility on Public Universities’ Strategic Map” (*La Responsabilidad Social en el mapa estratégico de las universidades públicas*), Núñez Chicharro and Alonso Carrillo (2009) outline the manner in which the major socio-economic and cultural changes in recent years have triggered the need for universities to adapt quickly, putting its until now rigid structure to the test. They affirm that the “social dimension of the Bologna Process must be considered from a strategic perspective, that is, we must analyze the impact of the policies aimed at correcting the deficiencies noticed by the interest groups, in relation to the degree of completion of the mission of universities.” Furthermore, the authors affirm that it is precisely this current definition of the concept of Social Responsibility as we know it today, and its models of divulgation, that represent an opportunity to integrate the social aspects of the process of change, leading us to investigate Research Stream No. 4—Spreading USR.

An important initiative is the *University Strategy 2015*, which is coordinated between the Ministry of Education (Government of Spain), the Autonomous Regions and the universities, with the objective of modernizing Spanish universities,

through the promotion of excellence in education and research, internationalization of the university system and its implication in economic change based on knowledge and improvement in innovation. The initiative strives to improve university education and research in order to adapt to social needs and demands, and the international context. In this sense, the *University Strategy 2015* seeks to position Spain's best universities amongst the top 100 in Europe, promote Spain's globally competitive university campuses in the same league as the most prestigious institutions in the world and help the entire Spanish university system to improve the quality of their offering and promote efficiency in teaching and research through definition of objectives and efforts.

The *University Strategy 2015* is aligned with processes of modernization of the European university system, as indicated in the communication from the European Commission (May 2006) to the Council and the European Parliament entitled "Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation," in the Council Resolution (November 23, 2007), "Modernising Universities for Europe's Competitiveness in a Global Knowledge Economy," and the Peer Learning Activity document (June 2008) entitled "Circling the Knowledge Triangle from the Perspective of Education: The Added Value in Better Connecting Higher Education to Research and Innovation." It was then in the Lisbon Strategy where the need for Europe to be a society and economy based on knowledge is identified. This requires a series of structural measures in which the "knowledge triangle"—education, research and innovation—represents the lever for the required cultural change.

The University faces unique challenges in order to be useful to society, including having a focus on content, attitudes and values, which strives to achieve balance in specialized excellence and a high quality humanistic preparation. Furthermore, this entails effectively educating professional citizens and promoting and developing preparation in ethical principles, social values and gestures of solidarity. These challenges also entail that parameters of excellence, debate, research and critical judgment are applied to the community's commitment with the same rigor as in other areas of university activity. The University should be capable of assessing the needs of society as a whole and providing a solution for its problems, in addition to contributing to its wellbeing, and social and human development. Finally, the University should educate participative citizens and become involved in civic activities related to the communities in which it operates and on an international level. In order to accomplish the aforementioned, the University should govern and administrate its resources in a socially effective and efficient manner,

promote personal values and socially responsible citizens, generate and transfer knowledge, apply socially responsibility criteria to the internal management of the university and become involved in both its local community and the global world of solidarity.

According to Clugston and Calder (1999) and Leal Filho (1999), evidence of the following specific practices should be required from post-secondary institutions that claim they integrate sustainability concepts: written mission statements, academic programs, energy and purchasing practices, outreach, faculty hiring, and faculty development. Leal Filho identifies additional areas of commonality among institutions implementing sustainability including: the integration of sustainability in measurable objectives; an awareness of the role of the post-secondary educational institution in social and ecological systems; the use of knowledge of sustainability as a criterion for promoting faculty and granting tenure; the support of campus life services which emphasize practices promoting sustainability; and the engagement in forming partnerships both locally and globally to enhance sustainability. Clugston, Calder, and Leal Filho agree that the manner in which post-secondary educational institutions define and approach sustainability varies.

M. G. Serap Atakan and Tutku Eker's (2007) case study of corporate identity at Istanbul Bilgi University (IBU), a socially responsible university from the Turkish higher education sector, discusses how universities driven to project a positive image to their internal and external stakeholders have incorporated corporate identity programs as part of their strategies to be more competitive. In this specific study, the authors analyzed IBU's existing corporate identity management, focusing on the "philosophy, mission and values of the university as part of its corporate identity mix, rather than on its visual identity or communication strategies." The findings demonstrate that taking into consideration that the core values of IBU contribute to the improvement of both internal stakeholders and society as a whole, the University's efforts in social responsibility are also a part of its corporate identity.

In "Corporate Social Responsibility Starts at University," Muijen (2004) proposes two strategies for the issue of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): a compliance strategy and a cultural change strategy, focusing on the ethical and philosophical aspects of each approach. The author makes clear that the implementation of CSR in organizations does not result solely from a compliance strategy, but rather in conjunction with "a strategy aimed at stimulating a transformation process on the corporate culture level." The future success of CSR depends on the attitude of future generations, which will influence relations between companies

and society. More specifically, universities have a fundamental role due to the impact that social responsibility could have on the design of its educational and research offering, as well as by incorporating it into their mission, vision and corporate strategy.

Research Stream No. 3—Educating on USR

This stream evaluates interdisciplinary approaches to student learning and sustainability. Given the current condition of the world and the ever increasing needs of society, it is now essential that USR becomes a permanent part of the university teaching structure as soon as possible.

In addition to the role that university administrators have in running their institutions responsibly, it has become increasingly important for “business education to focus on cultivating the sort of talent likely to generate social capital, that will in turn support sustainability” (Jackson 2012). This implies a need to assess how business school curricula could potentially incorporate elements of economic, environmental and social sustainability.

While institutions of higher education could be important leaders and models for the adoption of pro-sustainability behaviors and policies, the relationship between higher education and sustainability is strained by conflicts over fundamental values (Martin 2000). An increasing number of educators (Bonnett 1999; Chase 1998; Chiras 1998; Leal Filho 1999; Orr 1994) believe that the goal of education should not be viewed simply as a mastery of subject matter but rather the mastery of one’s person (Davis et al. 2003).

The literature attributes the main reasons for teaching business ethics to “the impact of recent scandals, the evidence that decision skills can be taught, and the opportunity to address personal virtue” (Harris 2008). This case study established the foundation “for consideration of the purpose of business ethics teaching, the importance of reflection and the evaluation of ethics teaching.”

The knowledge attained by an educated person carries with it the responsibility to ensure that knowledge is well used by society. While there are research findings which detail the benefit perceived on behalf of Administrators when integrating the concept of sustainability into teaching and its effect on increasing visibility for the institution (Teichert 1996), relatively few studies have yet to be carried out.

One especially applicable study is “Corporate Social Responsibility Education in Europe” (Matten and Moon 2004), which reports on a 2003 survey of CSR education, more specifically teaching and research, in Europe. This survey

specifically targets the question of whether business schools are no more than “brainwashing institutions educating their graduates only in relatively narrow shareholder value ideology which has been raised by numerous commentators in the aftermath of recent corporate scandals in America in the business press (Caulkin 2004; Goshal 2003) as well as in academia (Adler 2002).” The majority of these studies have taken place at North American schools on related subjects such as marketing and ethics. Apart from Mahoney’s dated work (1990), which offers a comparative study of teaching business ethics in the United States, United Kingdom and continental Europe, there is a significant gap when it comes to more recent information on the state and shape of the contemporary CSR field in European business schools. Thus, Matten and Moon (2004) strive to fill this gap, bearing three specific goals in mind: “provide an overview of teaching and research in the broad field of CSR”; “capture the range of meanings of and activities in CSR reflecting Europe’s different business and educational contexts”; and “find out what role in terms of visibility, acceptance with students, resource provision for research and general esteem the field possesses at European universities.”

Matten and Moon (2004) cite their most surprising finding to be the strong level of interest in CSR among practitioners and industry, allowing one to conjure up an optimistic answer to questions about the role of ethical issues in business schools and attitude of business educators faced with the question of whether to incorporate social responsibility as part of the curriculum. They also detail the results of mainstreaming of CSR and the consistent coverage of the topic in most countries surveyed to be particularly encouraging regarding the “ethical issues on the teaching agenda of business schools in Europe.”

In “The Case Against Business Ethics Education: A Study in Bad Arguments,” Hooker analyzes several popular arguments against teaching business ethics, including:

- (a) the ethical duty of business people is to maximize profit within the law . . . (the Milton Friedman argument);
- (b) business people respond to economic and legal incentives, not to ethical statements . . . ;
- (c) one cannot study ethics in any meaningful sense anyway, because it is a matter of personal preference . . . ;
- (d) moral character is formed in early childhood . . . ;
- and (e) business students see no motivation to study ethics and will not take it seriously. (Hooker 2004)

We believe the key to be in the author’s approach of not preaching to his classes, but rather using a direct approach and concentrating on theory and application,

as in any other academic discipline, thus presenting ethics as “a tool for realizing one’s aspirations” and serving as food for thought. In this regards, it is important to cite Leal Filho’s (1999) earlier research findings that increasing awareness often leads to increased acceptance of sustainability. The key is then to communicate the message amongst the entire university campus and community.

Regarding research ethics, there is an expectation on a global basis that universities “ensure that policies guiding researchers’ conduct are in place and adhered to,” including in developing countries (Mazonde, Jackson-Malete, and Sugarman 2007). The successful implementation of an ethics policy at the University of Botswana (Africa) proved how this is possible even in the absence of a national regulatory framework, resulting in increased awareness of research ethics, the management of allegations of research misconduct and a model which serves for other research institutions in the developing world.

Finally, an empirical study conducted at the American University of Beirut, the first of its kind in Lebanon, illustrates that the issue of managerial ethics is gaining popularity in the Middle East (Zgheib 2005). In their study, they assessed the moral reasoning of business students when facing ethical dilemmas, concluding that due to a lack of formal training in managerial ethics (less than 20 percent of students were enrolled in an optional business ethics course), students were likely basing ethical decisions on their personality, experience and culture, more specifically, religion and family. These results lead to the question—can ethical behavior be learned? We recommend a similar study but across institutions in order to determine the level of ethics in different teaching institutions.

Research Stream No. 4—Spreading USR

This stream showcases the university as a learning organization for sustainable thinking and practices. Such organizational learning has contributed to spreading a campus sustainability movement towards reducing waste, preserving ecology, contributing to economic stability and demonstrating overall social responsibility on campus and in the community.

When it comes to spreading USR, collaboration is seen as a benefit by faculty members and administrators who attribute campus-wide sustainability initiatives as instrumental in expanding interdisciplinary professional relationships and collaborative efforts (Davis et al. 2003). Leal Filho’s earlier research (1999) shows that campus-wide sustainability initiatives encourage intense dialogue and collaboration. Faculty members and administrators felt that sustainability efforts generated greater student appreciation of the responsibilities of individuals for current

global problems and encouraged students to be more proactive. This finding is consistent with one of the key principles of the Earth Charter Commission (2011), which states that humans must value both natural and social capital. Faculty members and administrators viewed vision development as a key benefit and said that the development of mission statements, goals, objectives and policies which emphasize environmental, social, cultural, and ethical dimensions had resulted in a stronger focus, renewed commitment, and clearer understanding of the purpose of the institution (Davis et al. 2003). This finding is related to Leal Filho's suggestion that a shared vision by the governing body of the institution is necessary for the successful integration of the concepts of sustainability (1999).

On a contemporary and practical level, the "Raise the Funds—Campus Action Toolkit" published by the Campus in Power organization (2008) empowers student innovation in sustainability. It serves as a guide for students and administrators to funding mechanisms for campus sustainability initiatives, including endowments and internal campus banks, administrative funds, outside grants, alumni funds, revolving loan funds, etc.

Research Stream No. 5—Reporting and USR

This stream assesses STARS, the College Sustainability Report Card and the GRI framework (GRI 2009) as strategic tools for implementation and focuses on how higher education institutions are using them to measure and evaluate institutional sustainability programs.

As significant change agents in society, universities incorporate their objectives into their actions (education and training, research, management, etc.), starting with diverse initiatives on a worldwide basis that favor the fulfillment of such commitments. One of these initiatives is the Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS), which was analyzed with the objective of providing knowledge and experience that may serve as a reference to higher education institutions during their quest for sustainability (Wigmore-Alvarez and Ruiz-Lozano 2010). STARS is based upon Brundtland's interpretation of sustainable development, as detailed in *Our Common Future: The World Commission on Environment and Development* (Brundtland 1987).

The relation between STARS's credits and a higher education institution's environmental, social and economic performance represent the system's "attempts to translate this broad and inclusive view of sustainability to measurable objectives at the campus level" (AASHE 2011).

Another group, the Sustainable Endowment Institute (SEI), rates colleges and universities in its College Sustainability Report Card, on several different areas of green compliance, such as recycling, student involvement and green building. The AASHE² has collaborated with SEI in the past and hopes to again in the future (Wigmore-Alvarez and Ruiz-Lozano 2009).

The GRI reporting framework establishes the principles and performance indicators that organizations can use on a voluntary basis to measure and report their economic, environmental and social performance. The cornerstone of the framework is the Sustainability Reporting Guidelines, whose third version is more commonly referred to as the G3 Guidelines. Another component of the framework includes Sector Supplements, with unique indicators for specific sectors. Universities have been increasingly embracing GRI Sustainability Reporting, which “provides the consistency that shareholders, potential investors, analysts and other stakeholders seek when evaluating and comparing an organization’s ESG performance” (Mehallow 2011). European universities that have followed suit in accordance with GRI’s G3 guidelines include: Bayreuth University (Germany), ETSI-UPM (Spain), Florida Universitaria (Spain), Leuphana University of Lueneburg (Germany), Turun University of Applied Science (Finland), Universidad de Zaragoza (Spain), Universidad Internacional de Andalucía (Spain), Universidad de Santiago de Compostela (Spain), Universität für Bodenkultur Wien (Austria), University of Birmingham (UK), Universidad de Cádiz (Spain) and the University of Gothenburg (Sweden).

The creation of a CSR or Sustainability Report in accordance with the norms of a reporting framework such as GRI is one of the key aspects, amongst others, that characterize the adoption of a social responsibility model in companies, complementing additional governmental or environmental indicators (Casani, Pérez-Esparrells, and Rodríguez 2010).

In its development of the STARS credit system, the AASHE consulted several other sustainability reporting and assessment frameworks, including GRI. STARS and GRI are similar in that both systems are in accordance with the definition of sustainability and include social, economic and environmental considerations. Both systems require transparency in reporting. GRI thus proved to be a valuable resource for the AASHE in its development of STARS credits, for which the AASHE strives to remain abreast of GRI’s activities and developments. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight key differences between the systems, such as the fact that STARS was developed by and for colleges and universities and thus covers topics specific to higher education, such as curriculum and research, which

GRI does not include. Furthermore, GRI is not a rating system, but rather a reporting framework. While STARS can also be considered a reporting framework, it is also a rating system. As such, STARS is organized into a series of credits, while GRI's organizational system is based on reporting fields. Finally, GRI recently published a Non-Profit Sector Supplement, which shows a greater relationship between both initiatives, as they both deal mainly with non-profit entities.

Another reporting mechanism is the United Nations Global Compact³ Progress Reports, which reflect a lack of awareness of social responsibility on behalf of the public sector in Spain, and more specifically public Spanish universities, despite their clear vocation in society (Larrán et al. 2010). Upon analysis of the Progress Reports registered, there is a greater presence of the large private corporations versus universities, with a total of six Progress Reports registered during 2009, corresponding to the following higher education institutions in Spain: EADA, ESADE, Universidad de Cantabria, CIS—The College for International Studies, the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, and the Universidad de Málaga.

Research Stream No. 6—Evaluation of USR

This stream offers reflections on how the University's role in regards to sustainability is not limited solely to educating and conducting research on the concept, but rather on the ability to implement it.

While STARS (AASHE 2011), the College Sustainability Report Card (SEI 2009) and GRI (2009) are international reporting initiatives that provide a basis on which to evaluate higher education institutions, on a national level in Spain the Individual and Group Evaluation of university activity as detailed in *University Strategy 2015* involves providing solutions to the evaluation requirements of the members of the teaching-research group, as well as to the institutions, thus contributing positively to a more all-encompassing evaluation process of social responsibility. This also entails an audit of the role of current units in Spain (National Assessment and Planning Agency (ANEP); National Commission for the Evaluation of Research Activity (CNEAI); and the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA), defining the transformation projects of ANECA as determined by the Organic Law of Universities, as well as the coordination with quality assurance agencies in the Autonomous Regions. The objective of these agencies is to evaluate the quality of the universities and while some of the parameters analyzed are the object of USR, many other aspects are not, and therefore they do not guarantee socially responsible behavior.

The Assessment and Monitoring process can only reach its final objective if a set of measures is structured and oriented towards continuous follow-up of the action plan, its evolution and the results based on qualitative and quantitative indicators. Therefore, the follow-up and analysis of the fulfillment of the set of central themes and their main objectives should be carried out by a group of international experts with experience in these types of processes, in the form of an Assessment and Monitoring Committee (Ministerio de Educación 2010).

A sustainability report should be a part of any Social Responsibility Plan, which is the first step in carrying out successful management of social responsibility. This report should contain a master document covering the management and evaluation of the company's commitment to Social Responsibility, taking into account the economic, social and environmental dimensions that affect the entity and society (González et al. 2010). The authors discuss the existence of various instruments that facilitate evaluation processes, including self-evaluation and external evaluations that lead to accreditation (i.e., SGE 21, ISO 26000, SA 8000, etc.). Continuous improvement in the realm of social responsibility requires systematic evaluations of the different areas of the university.

Research Stream No. 7—Barriers and Accelerators

This stream will present an analysis of the barriers to sustainability in relation to the resources, responsibilities and potential of higher education, assessing different models from within various disciplines and integrating them to construct a framework, as well as presenting guidelines for designing curricula.

The goal is to compete in the global economy of the twenty-first century with a more solid university system that strengthens the economy and allows for training and education which are more appropriate for the changing needs of society. The changes introduced by the widespread use of information technology implies an enormous revolution that affects the way in which knowledge is transferred and which will justify radical changes in all phases in the higher education system. The paradigm of educating for a lifetime implies rethinking the educational function and more specifically, the role of universities in the knowledge society.

As detailed in *University Strategy 2015*, from an academic perspective, the advances in science make it a prerequisite to become specialized and provide more intense training in research and knowledge transfer. The mission of the university worldwide increasingly entails not only current knowledge transfer, but also educating on how to research and how new developments are created.

From a social perspective, society demands solutions to challenges with which it's faced. The world's major current challenges will require newly created knowledge and professionals who are highly qualified, as well as the need to continuously update content and learning systems.

From an economic perspective, there is a call to action for universities to increase innovation and economic competitiveness, and the need to improve response time with regards to decision making, as well as the responsibility of the administrations to facilitate this process, eliminating barriers, incorporating incentives and generating trust. An effort must be made in order to improve the role of the University as a vehicle for progression, wellbeing and cultural and competitive advancement, keeping abreast of the latest trends in management and reinforcing its role in society as a driver in the economy and empowering it to lead the way for the society and economy of the twenty-first century.

At the forefront of USR in Spain, Larrán et al. (2010) concludes that neither intercultural differences nor the focus on sustainability taken appear to influence the barriers or accelerators involved in the implementation of USR strategies. They do highlight an important barrier not previously referenced in USR literature—fear of improving transparency, as evidenced in political costs. Transparency is identified as being a key factor to be improved upon and which is achieved in part by the publication of sustainability reports.

The AUSJAL consortium of Latin American institutions takes a stance that policies are not barriers to entry and don't attempt to override definitions or actions specific to a university (Red RSU-AUSJAL 2009). Rather, their objective is to guide and set a path for each university in terms of social responsibility.

Leal Filho (2000) notes that there are some areas within the higher education sector where the concept of sustainability is not yet fully understood, arguing that many academicians find the concept of sustainability too abstract and broad. Furthermore, educational institutions lack sufficient personnel and adequate resources needed to justify sustainability initiatives (Davis et al. 2003). Leal Filho concludes that concrete initiatives are needed to provide a clear plan of action for implementing sustainability initiatives.

A significant attempt to define the role of post-secondary educational institutions in promoting sustainability was made in 1990 with the Talloires Declaration. As important as the Talloires Declaration is as a guiding set of ecological commitments, the obstacles to transforming higher education are daunting (Clugston and Calder 1999). More specifically, they cite the tremendous disincentives to sustainability that are built into the economy: "both perverse subsidies and pricing

that fails to distinguish between healthy (sustainable) and destructive economic activities” as well as the difficulty of “reframing” an institution.

Despite these obstacles, numerous higher education institutions are engaging in integrating sustainability across the institution by transforming disciplines, operations, and research at both the national and local levels. According to Clugston and Calder, the American Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF) is continuously working to identify characteristics of higher education institutions fully committed to sustainability through the Sustainability Indicators Project, “a set of orientations and activities” specific to colleges and universities that are fully committed to sustainability. Though approaches will vary, each institution must be implementing practices in the following areas to be considered advanced on the path to sustainability: written statements of the mission and purpose of the institution expresses their philosophies and commitments; the institution appropriately incorporates the concepts of sustainability into all academic disciplines; a shift from the current academic paradigm lies in reflection of the role of the institution in its social and ecological systems; knowledge of sustainability is a major concern in the hiring, tenure, and promotion systems; in its production and consumption the institution follows sustainable policies and practices; provide institutional support and campus student life services; and the institution is engaged in outreach and forming partnerships both locally and globally to enhance sustainability (Clugston and Calder 1999).

In summary, recent research provides evidence of an increasing focus on behalf of higher education institutions with regards to incorporating the concepts of sustainability into research and operations. From the initial concerns for sustainability in the early 1970s to the development of the Talloires Declaration in 1990, higher education institutions have begun to recognize the importance of a positive and responsible outlook towards the environment.

With regards to barriers and accelerators, administrators reported assessment as the key challenge associated with incorporating the concepts of sustainability into teaching (Davis et al. 2003). They described an absence of any systematic effort to determine the extent to which sustainability concepts had been incorporated into the institution’s academic functions. Also absent was a broad-scale examination of the effectiveness of the sustainability initiative. Although at different stages of development in the assessment process, each institution stated the need for a reliable assessment instrument for campus-wide sustainability initiatives. Finally, faculty members and administrators viewed time, support, assessment, and students’ understanding as the key challenges.

Research Stream No. 8—Case Studies

Relevant and applicable case studies were reviewed in an effort to determine higher education institutions' understanding of USR. The aforementioned research streams served as a context to explore the sustainability practices in each case study and to provide a basis on which to evaluate best practices in sustainability, in an effort to replicate and implement them in higher education institutions globally. In addition, the research streams can be considered as a suggested implementation model for institutions of higher education that strive to implement a sustainability initiative.

In "Educating Sustainable Societies for the Twenty-first Century" (Davis et al. 2003), a qualitative cross-case analysis was conducted of two higher education institutions in the United States that have demonstrated noteworthy progress in integrating the concepts of sustainability into teaching. The five themes around which the findings are centered are: "understanding, methods, benefits, challenges, and driving forces," which ultimately provided guidance for institutions that are considering incorporating the concepts of sustainability. In summary, several insights emerged from this study. Public higher education institutional efforts to integrate the concepts of sustainability campus-wide "require a strong institutional commitment to a sustainability philosophy, as evidenced by the incorporation of the concepts of sustainability into key institutional mission statements, goals, objectives, and policies." Also, leaders at both institutions in question showed a personal belief in and commitment to the concept of sustainability, while faculty at both institutions used a variety of teaching approaches to increase student awareness of sustainability. Finally, the results suggest that "development of an individual's (faculty or student) knowledge of sustainability requires a combination of personal commitment and involvement in campus-wide initiatives."

More recently, an article regarding Proyecto Ipso (Pomeroy et al. 2009), outlines the initiative of the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya (UPC) in Spain to propose a set of measures that will act as an incentive to the introduction of sustainability criteria amongst the academic area, more specifically involving the Teaching/Research Staff Statute. This document details the objective of the survey in question, which is to become familiarized with the experiences of other universities that promote awareness, support and incentives revolving around the teaching and research of Sustainable Human Development (SHD). Also, the study aims to identify the mechanisms which motivate employees in the universities in question in order to achieve a growing level of integration of

sustainable development in the academic activity. Finally, this article seeks to promote dialogue on existing initiatives within the UPC on this subject, in order to provide useful elements for debate.

The results of this study were that many universities are actively developing and promoting sustainable development and they contributed innovative proposals that will help us to think about how to advance in our local contexts. The authors believe that a more detailed study specifically targeting those universities that have clearly adopted the desire to integrate global, transversal and efficient strategies, as well as those with positive results, would be the next step. Furthermore, in this study they were able to identify more initiatives based on incentives, as opposed to criteria or institutional recognition. They propose to continue researching this trend, though they are confident in making some hypotheses. The authors believe that the incentives, as actions which take place at a specific time, are easier to implement than strategies that require more complex changes, citing the fact that the universities that have sustainable development policies carry out more supporting initiatives and institutional recognition than the rest. On the contrary, there was not a lot of difference regarding the application of the criteria.

In summary, this situation reflects the difficulty involved in changing the core aspects of the university, such as those necessary for the incorporation of criteria when it comes to hiring, professional development or project evaluation. Finally, it is important to recognize that the implementation of this type of initiatives requires a deeper debate prior to carrying them out, due to the fact that the criteria require consensus within the academic community.

Another study conducted in Spain, "Social Responsibility at Universities in Spain (*Responsabilidad Social en las Universidades de España*)" (Ruiz and Soria 2009), demonstrates the level of USR at Spanish universities, "framed within the relationship that they kept with the society where they are integrated, not forgetting the importance of their social and educational work." The goal of this study was to identify the USR initiatives and determine the presence of USR in the university organizational structure and relationship with its stakeholders. The study analyzed the web content of ten public universities in the Autonomous Region of Andalusia, Spain, in the field of USR and the respective departments responsible for managing it. The findings reveal that the term USR is a new concept, which has not yet been fully established and divulged in the university. Nevertheless, the authors highlight the positive and responsible attitude of these universities in the "definition of objectives, initiatives and activities" carried out.

In the Inspirational Guide for the Implementation of PRME (UN Global Compact 2012), eight research streams were also identified at the CR₃ international Conference on Corporate Responsibility, held at the Hanken School of Economics in Helsinki (Finland), which was the result of this business school's decision to collaborate on their implementation of PRME, along with Audencia Nantes School of Management (France), ISAE/FGV (Brazil) and additional signatories, including La Trobe University (Australia). The objective of the first CR₃ conference was to generate thought leadership in relation to Corporate Responsibility actions that contribute to make a positive difference, as well as challenges encountered in Corporate Responsibility practice. Most contributions were focused on the eight streams, one of which was dedicated to responsible management education, while the others addressed the role of different stakeholders of business schools. Furthermore, the organization of the streams then allowed for faculty members from the participating schools to cooperate and learn about each other's research.

In line with the aforementioned Research Streams No. 4—Spreading USR and No. 3—Educating on USR, the CR₃ conference has contributed to greater awareness of responsibility across the curriculum within each school, with representation from subjects such as management and organization, marketing, supply chain management and corporate geography, and politics and business. CR₃ conferences provide scholars the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience, raising awareness around Corporate Responsibility efforts, research and activities, while strengthening the partner schools' leadership within the Corporate Responsibility field and as role models for the implementation of PRME.

Conclusions

The findings of this overview of literature on USR in the eight research streams presented provide some guidance and orientation for higher education institutions interested in incorporating the concepts of sustainability.

Several themes and insights emerged from the research conducted, which can be summarized as follows. While the different reporting mechanisms, evaluation tools and initiatives reviewed vary in purpose, scope and function, they share similar objectives. The sustainability management systems and reporting tools discussed facilitate the capture of baseline data on sustainability and environmental performance, as well as process-oriented information on universities' success at managing sustainability.

The research streams provide a foundation for strategic planning by identifying important issues and methods to set and achieve USR goals. Systems such as

STARS and the College Sustainability Report Card allow institutions to measure what campuses are doing and how they are doing it, assessing sustainability integration across different functional areas of the university and its campus, as well as cross-campus and institutional benchmarking, helping one another by sharing successes, challenges and opportunities. Finally, reporting mechanisms such as GRI or Global Compact's Progress Reports allow for the effective communication of the results of the assessment of sustainability.

In summary, the overview of USR literature in these research streams provides valuable insight into important attributes of social responsibility in higher education, recognizing that its accomplishment requires a long-term commitment which should be echoed in its mission and goal statements, procedures, annual reports and other organizational decision-making processes.

Endnotes

1. AUSJAL is the consortium of thirty-one Jesuit Latin American higher education institutions.
2. AASHE is a member-driven organization with a mission to empower higher education to lead the sustainability transformation.
3. The United Nations Global Compact is a strategic policy initiative for businesses and organizations that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with principles in the areas of human rights, labor, environment and anti-corruption.

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