

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Aldeanueva Fernández, Ignacio
Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Empresariales
Universidad de Málaga
Málaga, España
ialdeanuevaf@uma.es

Jiménez Quintero, José Antonio
Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Empresariales
Universidad de Málaga
Málaga, España
jajq@uma.es

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the relevance that has, at international level, the Social Responsibility in higher education institutions (USR). It states, after introducing and defining the topic under study, a set of experiences in the context referred. Among them, special attention has been paid to the Assessment Instrument for Sustainability in Higher Education (Project AISHE), but all contribute to strengthening initiatives presented incorporating social responsibility in management systems and policies of universities and other higher education institutions, highlighting the role, fundamental and necessary, which plays in the advancement of societies.

KEY WORDS: University Social Responsibility; Institutions of Higher Education; Groups of Interest.

INTRODUCTION

In the current context, characterized by globalization, environmental turbulence and inequalities of various kinds, education and training are key factors in achieving progress in societies, both in the economic and social cohesion of the same. In the area that we present in this work, higher education, the social dimension has gained considerable importance, as demonstrated in the context of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), statements and communiques from the heads of Europe in education, such as Bologna Declaration (1999), the Prague Declaration (2001), the Berlin Communiqué (2003), the Bergen Communiqué (2005), the London Communiqué (2007) or the Leuven Communiqué (2009).

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Under the consideration that each university usually translate University Social Responsibility (USR) in their strategies and tactics of action, as a reliable way to achieve wellness goals for their constituencies, we have an impact here in experiences of responsibility that have crossed the local environment of a certain university.

At this point, not only has Europe the USR with special relevance in universities and other higher education institutions. In the Southern Cone, the initiatives are numerous and cover various countries. Among them, we highlight the Iberoamerican Network of Universities for Corporate Social Responsibility (Redunirse) and the Association of Universities Entrusted to the Society of Jesus in Latin America, which is committed to the University Social Responsibility in the development of their activities (AUSJLA, 2011). It also highlights the University Project: Build Country, whose main objective is to promote the USR in Chilean university system (Team Coordinator UCP, 2004).

Also, the social dimension of higher education includes providing flexible learning pathways from the perspective of lifelong learning and ensures the return to society, the knowledge generated in universities. Furthermore, the social dimension has been gaining increasing importance, emphasizing its transversal nature, which affects the rest of the pillars of higher education, such as mobility, excellence, quality, etc. Thus, through a quality higher education without barriers of any kind, it is possible to build a knowledge economy and advance economic recovery and strengthening social cohesion. Therefore, we can say that the knowledge society depends largely on the universities, since they play a key role in research, education and training. Universities operate in an increasingly globalized environment, constantly changing and are characterized by increasing competition to attract the most qualified and the emergence of new needs, which they are required to respond.

In connection with the above, we refer to the concept of social responsibility, in universities and other educational institutions of higher education. There are several definitions of the concept of Social Responsibility or University Social Responsibility, as follows: University Social Responsibility is the ability of the university to disseminate and implement a set of general principles and specific values, through four processes considered key in the university, such as management, teaching, research and extension programs. Responding well socially, to the university community and the country where it is inserted (Jiménez, 2008).

It is therefore important to promote the USR, as it involves enhancing, in the best way, the contribution of universities to economic and social development of societies that maintain

and drive them. In addition, it should provide a return of knowledge to society, this becomes a paradigm in the eyes of researchers, strategists and managers in the field of the USR.

The application of the USR represents a differentiation factor in college that applies and, therefore, a success in an increasingly competitive environment. In Spain, the actions in this matter are varied. Notably, in addition to the development and publication of Social Responsibility reports, by Spanish universities, as heterogeneous actions have been implemented, and ranging from adherence to relevant international initiatives in the area under study, to projects or programs led by the universities themselves. This highlights the importance and growing, that is acquiring the Social Responsibility in the Spanish university system.

In sum, on USR, in addition to individual performances which each university develops, there exist some collective initiatives that aim to develop the art that we present. Among these are, the proposed Social Councils Forum of Public Universities of Andalusia, the Universities Project Team, led by the University of Zaragoza and the Ecology and Development Foundation, and the proposal of the Working Group on Environmental Quality and Sustainable Development of the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities on green purchasing by universities.

However, the importance of presenting the subject under study is significant not only nationally, but also internationally. Next, we discuss a set of experiments carried out in different countries, demonstrating their study, the relevance of social responsibility in the management systems of universities and other higher education institutions. Among them, they pay special attention the Assessment Instrument for Sustainability in Higher Education (Project AISHE). However, all initiatives developed and analyzed in this work show the commitment that, at present, have several institutions of higher education to Social Responsibility.

DEVELOPMENT

1. Measurement Instrument for Sustainability of High Education

We begin by exposing one of the most significant experiences, in the European context, on Social Responsibility in higher education institutions. This is the Assessment Instrument for Sustainability in Higher Education (Measurement Instrument for Sustainability of High Education), called AISHE Project, an instrument developed by the Dutch organization DHO, (Stichting Duurzaam Hoger Onderwijs – Foundation for Sustainable Higher Education).

The mission of this organization is that all graduates possess skills in higher education to contribute to sustainable development. To achieve this, it requires cooperation with educational institutions, student organizations, governments, businesses and civil society. The motto of the organization supports the mission of the same, stating that "every student has to leave higher education with leadership qualities for sustainable development" [Stichting DHO, 2012, p. 1]⁽¹⁾.

The AISHE project's origins date back to 2000 in Holland. In this country, pioneer in education for sustainable development, emerged the idea of building a tool to assess such education. The importance of having education for sustainable development in the project study requires that we pay attention to it, indicating its most relevant aspects. It is important to mention, that education for sustainable development aims to help people develop skills and acquire attitudes and skills that enable them to make informed decisions for themselves and others, now and in the future, and to implement those decisions. There are several characteristics that define education for sustainable development. Among them, we note the following (UNESCO, 2007):

- It is based on the principles and values that support sustainable development.
- It deals with the well conditions of the three areas of sustainability (environment, society and economy).
- It Promotes learning.
- It is locally relevant and appropriate from a cultural vision.
- It is based on the needs, beliefs and conditions of each country.
- It Adapts to changes in the concept of sustainability.
- It Increases the capacity of citizens towards the decision-making at the community level, environmental responsibility, quality of life, etc.
- It is interdisciplinary. Not one discipline can claim it as their own, but all can contribute to it.
- It uses a variety of pedagogical techniques that promote participatory learning.

To carry out the AISHE Project, it was based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM model). This model is known with the acronym of the organization which created it, European Foundation for Quality Management. It is essential to analyze the instrument it can be integrated into the quality management as it is a necessary internal quality management of higher education institutions to enable them to achieve excellence in various fields.

The EFQM model is based on the following fundamental concepts of excellence (EFQM, 2010):

- Balanced results.
- Added value for customers.
- Leading with vision, inspiration and integrity.
- Managing by processes.
- Achieving success through people.
- Foster creativity and innovation.
- Develop partnerships.
- Taking responsibility for a sustainable future.

AISHE Project addresses the four functions of institutions of higher education. In connection therewith, we indicated that the major is education and research, but you should also consider that these institutions develop various operations (create jobs, consumer products, etc.) and are members of society (as part of the community intervening in social and political issues, etc.) (Stichting DHO, 2007).

As noted above, the AISHE Project began in 2000. When we start developing it conducted a comprehensive analysis of the stakeholders (higher education institutions, local and national governments, businesses, nonprofit organizations, society as a whole, etc.) selecting representatives from each of them up to the amount of twenty-five. Subsequently, we designed a list of criteria defining the project. They are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Criteria designed by the AISHE Project

| CRITERIA |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Vision of education for sustainable development. 2. Policy education for sustainable development. 3. Communication on education for sustainable development. 4. Environmental management. 5. External networks for sustainable development. 6. Groups of experts on sustainable development. 7. Education for sustainable development in staff development plans. 8. Sustainable Research and external services. 9. Sustainable development in the profile of the graduates. 10. Educational methodology. 11. Role of the teacher. 12. Sustainable development in student assessment. 13. Sustainable development in the curriculum. 14. Integrated management problems. 15. Sustainable training and graduation. 16. Specializing in sustainable development. 17. Rating personnel. 18. Rating students. 19. Evaluation by the professional field. 20. Rating society. |

Source: Compiled from Stichting DHO, 2007

Finally, we generated a five-point ordinal scale for each of the twenty criteria, resulting in a set of five for twenty descriptions. In relation to the above points, we note the following (Stichting DHO, 2007):

- Point 1. Oriented activity. Furthermore, decisions are usually made ad hoc.
- Point 2. Oriented process.
- Point 3. Oriented systems. There is a policy of the organization related to the medium-and long-term. In addition, the objectives are formulated explicitly, measured and evaluated. Also, there is feedback of the results.
- Point 4. Facing chain. There is an extensive network of contacts with secondary education and business to enable graduates to find work. The curriculum is based on professional qualifications.
- Point 5. Oriented society. There is a long-term strategy, pursuing continuous improvement policy. Contacts are both with consumers and with other stakeholders, the organization play an important role in the whole society.

AISHE Project has been tested using the valuations of various experts, the questionnaires prepared for the various groups involved (management, teachers, students, etc.) in different times (before the evaluation process, during that process and two months after completion), and tests carried within each organization involved, with different participants sepa-

rately, evaluating various aspects therein, such as, construct validity, internal consistency, applicability or equivalence.

With regard to implementation and certification, we note the following (Stichting DHO, 2007):

- In order to standardize the implementation of the AISHE an evaluation procedure project has been published, stressing over the same the following: group of about fifteen people representative of the entire staff of the educational institution, evaluation is possible if participants have basic knowledge on sustainable development, etc.

- We investigated whether a combination of educational programs could be evaluated together.

- It is designed and organized, with duration of three days, each year a training course for assessors. Participants in the same can obtain a certificate of AISHE auditor.

- With respect to certification, educational programs to reach it must be subjected to an evaluation by AISHE. The evaluator has to be selected by the Stichting Duurzaam Hoger Onderwijs.

As noted above, participation in the AISHE project is not limited to universities, as it enables other higher education institutions to be part of it. Among them, we note the following:

- National and regional organizations related to education for sustainable development: Foundation for Higher Education Development (Netherlands), Higher Education for Sustainable Development (Sweden), Catalan Research Network Education for Sustainability (Spain), etc.

- Education Institutions: University of Tampere (Finland), Charles University in Prague (Czech Republic), University of Maastricht (Netherlands), University of Agriculture, Athens (Greece), Lomonosov Moscow State University (Russia), University of Extremadura (Spain), University of Malaga (Spain), etc.

- Not higher education Organizations: Secondary Professional Education Development (Netherlands), etc.

To end the study of the AISHE project we indicate several reasons for their operation. Among them, presenting in relevant order, we discuss the following:

- Formulate a policy for education for sustainable development, increasing support to it by the management, staff and students of institutions of higher education.

- Making education for sustainable development is integrated into the high school.

– There is an important relationship between sustainable development and social responsibility. Transparency regarding the activities and decisions of the organization is one of the principles of social responsibility. In the field of higher education, transparency is essential for society to have more information about the impact of higher education institutions generate therein.

2. Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability

This initiative appears, in 2000, in the UK. It is an association of 18 universities committed to sustainable development. Among them, we can mention the University of Cambridge, Cardiff University, the University of Birmingham and the University of Newcastle. In the year of its creation, the association received an amount of 1.2 million euros from the British Ministry of Education. The aid was intended to help ensure that all of the colleges that promoted the initiative reach their strategic objectives contributing to sustainable development.

At present, these universities are committed to strategies to undertake activities that contribute to the sustainability of their community. We note the following:

- Using recycled materials in the construction of buildings.
- Part of the savings resulting from recycling activities is intended to grant scholarships.
- Establish volunteer programs accredited.
- Among the existing requirements in hiring university staff provides the contribution to sustainable development.
- Creating validation criteria for the new qualifications that include content related to sustainable development.
- Partnerships with the community through programs to help needy groups.

Accordingly, the Partnership for Higher Education Initiative Sustainability aims to educational standards and academic standards that influence universities will always attached to the concept of long-term planning, trying to integrate social and environmental objectives with economic and academic. Ultimately, this initiative was created to provide all universities, regardless of location or size, a set of guidelines for them to maximize their contribution to sustainable development in their community.

3. New Jersey Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability

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It is an association founded in 1999, in the State of New Jersey (USA), which currently consists of more than 40 institutions of higher education in that State. Among these institutions, it should be noted, as an example, Berkeley College, Princeton University and University of New Jersey. The association's mission is "to be an agent of transformation for New Jersey campuses become benchmarks of sustainability in our society and in the world" [NJHEPS, 2004, p. 5]⁽²⁾.

The commitment to sustainable design is essential to contribute to sustainability, as through it is possible to reduce energy consumption, improve student learning, increase productivity of employees of educational institutions, sensitizing students about environmental impacts, promote smart growth, etc. (NJHEPS, 2007).

The sustainable campus initiative in New Jersey is based on a set of strategic objectives. Among them, we note the following (NJHEPS, 2004):

- Education for sustainability is fundamental to the development of the community, requiring his presence in higher education and its assessment in the curriculum.
- Climate change is closely related to sustainability, energy efficiency represents a commitment that contributes to the improvement of the environment and to promote sustainability.
- Sustainable use of materials.
- Involving students in the initiative.
- Disclosure of the activities carried out and planned the education sector and society as a whole.

One of the key elements in transforming college campuses in New Jersey has been the commitment to design high performance in building construction. Thus universities have managed to save financial resources, increase their prestige and cause significant improvements in the environment.

The institutions of higher education in New Jersey that are integrated into this initiative get various benefits. In connection therewith, we note the following (NJHEPS, 2007):

- Expectations regarding the improvement of public health and the environment are met. The construction of high performance buildings contributes to this significantly.
- Buildings constructed on college campuses can be used for several years, generating long-term benefits and contributing to energy efficiency.
- The design of high performance, especially through natural lighting, generates better academically.

- The initiatives of universities in relation to the environment and public health, through actions that affect their curriculum and facilities, can increase their chances of funding.

Regarding the funding of universities that comprise the New Jersey initiative Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability, note that is public (state aid for capital) and private (donations and funds from individuals). Now, all concerning the processes of design, construction standards, the costs associated with the project and the location of the new facility is determined by the boards of each institution, subject to the rules laid down on the use of land and respect for the environment (NJHEPS, 2004).

Finally, it is important to note that the actions carried out by these institutions of higher education in New Jersey, is a commitment to society and the environment, while seeking to optimize resources. In addition, New Jersey Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability therefore, a set of high education centers socially responsible.

4. Global Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability

It is an initiative that, through partnerships, brings together diverse institutions of higher education committed to sustainability in higher education. Regarding partnerships, we indicate the following:

- International Association of Universities. This partnership promotes accountability of universities in society, facilitating the exchange of experiences in the field of education and learning. It was founded in 1950 under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The mission of the International Association of Universities is to act as a global forum where those responsible for higher education to discuss and take action on issues of common interest and achieve goals through cooperation. Therefore, the values of academic freedom and institutional autonomy and responsibility to respond to the needs of society are obligations of the leaders of universities and other higher education institutions worldwide. Currently, the association has over 600 members (universities and other institutions and organizations of higher education) from about 150 countries (IAU, 2006). As an example, Argentina Catholic University, University of Ghent, University of Sao Paulo, University of Leipzig, University of Ghana, University of Delhi, University of Tehran, University of Bologna, University of Salamanca, etc.

- Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future. Was founded in 1992 as a result of the Talloires Declaration, signed in the same French city two years ago. In this declaration, the leaders (rectors and vice-rectors) of universities in different countries agreed

to establish measures to ensure that higher education institutions develop actions to promote sustainability. In this way, the said document states that universities must commit to education, research, policy formation, and information exchange (on population, environment and development). Thus, you can achieve a sustainable future. It also describes the need to create programs that are experts in environmental management and sustainable development. The Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future believes that the success of higher education is based on making sustainability and environmental cornerstones of universities. Furthermore, the association is the secretariat for signatories of the Talloires Declaration, which today have more than 400 firms from different institutions from all countries.

5. Global University Network for Innovation

This network was created, in 1999, by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations University (UNU) and the Technical University of Catalonia (TUC). Today, this network, which includes UNESCO Chairs higher education, higher education institutions and research centers related to innovation and social commitment of higher education, consists of 221 members from over 70 countries. Insert the following as examples: the Catholic University of Leuven, the UNESCO Chair in Education Sciences in Latin America and Caribbean, Northeastern University, the University of Indonesia, the Latin American Council of Management Schools, etc.

The mission of the Global University Network for Innovation is to "contribute to strengthening the role of higher education in society through the reform and innovation of higher education policies around the world, from the perspective of public service, relevance and social accountability" [GUNI, 2009, p. 2]⁽³⁾. The network performs various actions to fulfill that mission (GUNI, 2009):

- It helps to reduce the differences in the field of higher education between the developed countries and those that are developing.
- It promotes cooperation between higher education institutions and cooperation between them and society.
- It promotes the exchange of resources, ideas and innovations, thus contributing to social transformation through institutional processes of change.

In relation to the organizations that founded the Global University Network for Innovation, include the commitment of those with social responsibility in the field of higher education. One of them is the United Nations University, which aims to be known for its commit-

ment to issues of sustainability and regulatory compliance socially responsible in carrying out their activities. In addition, this organization works in teaching and research programs related to sustainability (UNU, 2009).

CONCLUSION

Social Responsibility plays a crucial role in today's organizations, as it helps to generate profits for themselves and their stakeholders. Several studies have analyzed the impact of this matter on various kinds of businesses. However, in the context of higher education, Social Responsibility also reached outstanding levels of relevance, as universities and other higher education institutions have a close collaboration with companies that maintain and foster the development of their activities.

It is, in short, to contribute, by these institutions, to achieve improvements in societies. Therefore, internationally, there are different initiatives that promote the integration of social responsibility in the management of higher education institutions. In this paper, as a 'state of affairs', we discussed the most significant in our point of view, highlighting the importance of higher education institutions, through their decisions and actions in progress of society.

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