A New Paradigm in Higher Education: University Social Responsibility (USR)

Lidia Giuffré[1] & Silvia E. Ratto[2]

Abstract

Higher education solely for personal development can not be considered acceptable nowadays, as the underlying sociocultural changes to the knowledge society have accelerated an evolutionary process and education was affected by democratization movements. The objective of the work was to analyze and remark the role of University Social Responsibility (USE) as a relevant issue in the compromise of the modern institutions of Higher Education. USR can be defined as the ability of the University to disseminate and implement a set of general principles and specific values, using four key processes: Management, Teaching, Research and Extension. As it is still an open field, most of what the universities practise as USR are within the framework of quality management and accreditation. The Social Area Projection in the universities generally involves technical assistance activities and institutional support through students volunteering. Two application examples conducted with students and teachers in the Faculty of Agronomy, University of Buenos Aires, are presented as an example of the proposal mission

Key words: University Social Responsibility, Higher Education, social area projection, application examples.

1. Introduction

According to Cabral (2011), the term university usually refers to the Latin origins of the word *universitas*, which could be translated as "community of teachers and scholars".

[1] Titular Professor. Chair of Edaphology, Silvia E. Ratto: Attached Professor. Chair of Edaphology
[2] Chair of Edaphology, Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Faculty of Agronomy. Av. San Martin 4453. C1417DSE. Buenos Aires. Argentina, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Today, it is felt that universities are involved more closely, more concretely and more centrally than ever before in the development of society at large. Higher education institutions play a crucial role in creating knowledge societies.

The crucial elements for the production of wealth are no longer the natural resources of the soil and subsoil, but the gray matter and intangible investments that can be assigned to functions such as Research & Development, but it should be emphasized that the technology developed in institutions of higher education demands greater efforts for an efficient transfer to society (Vessuri, 1993**).**

The declaration of UNESCO (2009) presented contributions of great interest in the principles and values of university life related to life in society (dignity, freedom, citizenship, democracy and participation, sociability and solidarity coexistence, common good and social equity, sustainable development and the environment, acceptance and appreciation of diversity) and specifically about university values (commitment to truth, integrity, excellence, interdependence and interdisciplinary).

The European Higher Education Area is shared by the university systems in Europe to promote mobility, interaction and opportunities for their members. environment. During the process of convergence, the social dimension remarked that human resources are the most valuable asset of knowledge, with strong background and critical thinking. Universities in the process of dialogue with society and social partners are incorporating aspects that influence their extension dimension and social projection.

The modern university is characterized by its contradictory nature: tradition versus innovation, stagnation versus renewal, statism versus dynamism. These pairs make higher education an area in constant evolutionary process today. The underlying sociocultural changes to the knowledge society have accelerated this evolutionary process (Sanchez Hipola and Zubillaga Rios, 2005). Models restricted to minority education, teacher-centered, knowledge as closed, final and static, and under the dominance of a transmitter information model, were affected by democratization movements.

Higher education solely for personal development can not be considered acceptable nowadays (UNESCO, 1996). In the current context of globalization the intellectual advancement of the individual must be related also with the broader goals of sustainable development, poverty reduction poverty, peace and human rights.

Educational institutions should monitor the creation and innovation in new technologies that may hold the answer to some of the challenges the world faces today, but it is necessary that students are equipped with the appropriate skills and business ethics.

According to Vallaeys (2007), Social Responsibility is an attempt to reformulate the nature of organizations through joint management theory to ethics, redefining organizational boundaries as more permeable and integrated with their social and natural environment.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has been widely discussed over the last decades.

Shawyun (2011) considered that the acceptance of CSR is based on the economic, social and environmental aspects that most firms should address, an ethical and a moral dimension of the firm towards its stakeholders, and that a successful organisation strives and succeeds in a healthy society that is sustainable.

At present, the importance of social commitment in professional practice (de la Cuesta, 2011), with a reflection on the role of universities in contributing to a more sustainable development, is highlighted through what is called University Social Responsibility (USR).

The objective of the work was to analyze and remark the role of University Social Responsibility as a relevant issue in the compromise of the modern institutions of Higher Education.

2. University Social Responsibility (USR)

University Social Responsibility is the ability of the University to disseminate and implement a set of general principles and specific values, using 4 key processes: Management, Teaching, Research and Extension, through the provision of educational services and transfer knowledge following ethical principles, good governance, respect for the environment, social engagement and the promotion of values. The University has a direct impact on the future of the world for the training of professionals and leaders, but it is also a social actor, which can promote the education of students in accordance with the external social reality, and make knowledge accessible to all (Domínguez Pachon, 2009).

Thöni and Schneller (2011) stated that Universities cannot survive today as autarkic systems with no direct links to other societal fields. Knowledge and innovation are recognised as significant driving forces of economic growth, social development, and job creation promotion. The knowledge transfer has increasingly become a subject of public and economic policy, and not limited to the education sector. We need to keep in mind, however, that there are also different cultural understandings of knowledge and modes of transfer, especially of traditional wisdom and indigenous knowledge, which have largely been marginalised.

3. Social Area Projection in universities

As manifested by Shawyun (2011), since it is still an open field, most of what the universities practise as USR are within the framework of quality management and accreditation. Directly or indirectly, the accreditation and quality management standards in most countries have community or social engagement criteria. These can range from services that are rendered free of charge to the community, to hosting a community or involving the community in its university life. A review shows that most of the universities will work within the confines of these standards to fulfil or meet the minimum requirements.

With reference to the impact of the universities in their environment, Dominguez Pachon (2009) considered that there are *technical assistance activities* (impact on groups that are developing some type of activity and require technical assistance to improve their performance). Additionally there are activities for institutional support through *volunteering* that promotes student participation in volunteer activities. Each social initiative means creating a learning community that enriches teaching and promotes new research projects, synergy between education, research and social participation is created.

We present two application examples conducted with students and teachers in the Faculty of Agronomy, University of Buenos Aires:

Extension projects UBANEX 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 with the NGO A Roof for my country: volunteer students work in orchards of peri-urban settlements, advising farmers on horticulture issues, and the Chair of Soil Science provides soil analysis for fertility and pollution (Giuffré *et al*, 2012, Giuffré *et al*, 2013b)

Inter-institutional relationship with the Botanical Garden of Buenos Aires: community intervention of undergraduate and graduate students in urban soils sampling and analysis (Giuffré *et al*, 2013a).

These activities have permitted students to develop skills applicable to other areas of work, and attitudes of valuing their belonging environment. As stated by Enriquez Clavero, 2006, they begin to move in a stable relationship with production systems or institutions, enabling graduates to learn at least four things: be a citizen, communicate, create and criticize.

Escotet (2005) proposes strategic alliances with the production system to enable the creation of a spirit of compromise and collaboration, with the inclusion of the university in a system of lifelong education and lifelong learning, and the teacher and student learning related to the world of work and social cohesion.

Education in the XXI century (UNESCO, 2009) invites the university to intervene through meaningful and sustainable actions in the community, also to be permeable to be influenced by society, and with a motivation to intervene for the most vulnerable communities.

According to Dominguez Pachon (2009) University articulates the relationship between technoscience and society, allowing (or not) the social control of science. Generates attitudes as scientific elitism (expertocracy) or otherwise promotes the democratization of science. Ultimately influences the definition and selection of problems the scientific agenda.

Martí Noguera (2010), presents an analysis of USR from a psychology perspective and sketches the first approximation on the study of university social responsibilities, values and empathy, with the objective to establish whether values of empathy are the variables to consider when trying to promote social responsibility. Values can be considered converging emotions and cognitions, and empathy was defined as the set of constructs included in the observed experiences of another, including affective and non-affective responses.

The University of Manchester (2014) presents their strategy for social responsibility that includes commitments to pursue change across the priority areas: Research with Impact, Socially-Responsible Graduates, Engaging our Communities, Responsible Processes, Environmental Sustainability. As a vision for the future, in 2011 they published the Strategic Plan for The University of Manchester (Manchester, 2020), a plan based on three core goals: academic values, research and social responsibility.

Within the context of the basis of the paradigm of complex thought, Del Palacio Valle (2013) noted that at present emerges the need for bonding and solidarity between all living beings, and proposes to characterize into this new paradigm one new ethical-ecological awareness to respond to crisis context of the third millennium, which can be applied to the principles of university responsibility.

4. Conclusions

The new role of social commitment in professional practice is a new challenge of the knowledge society and is carried out basing on the principles of University Social Responsibility (USR).

University institutions as social actors, must act with ethics in the promotion of knowledge transfer to society promoting a global sustainable development.

The practise of USR in Universities is within the framework of quality management and accreditation, so they must work to accomplish at least the minimum standards.

Social Area Projection should be strengthened according to the real and present community demands.

Society must be aware of the new paradigm of solidarity of Higher Education institutions to accomplish knowledge transfer demands.

Acknowledgement

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