



Comparative Research on the Social Responsibility of Universities in Europe and Development of a Community reference framework

EU-USR

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USR NETWORK MANIFESTO AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN



SCIENTER

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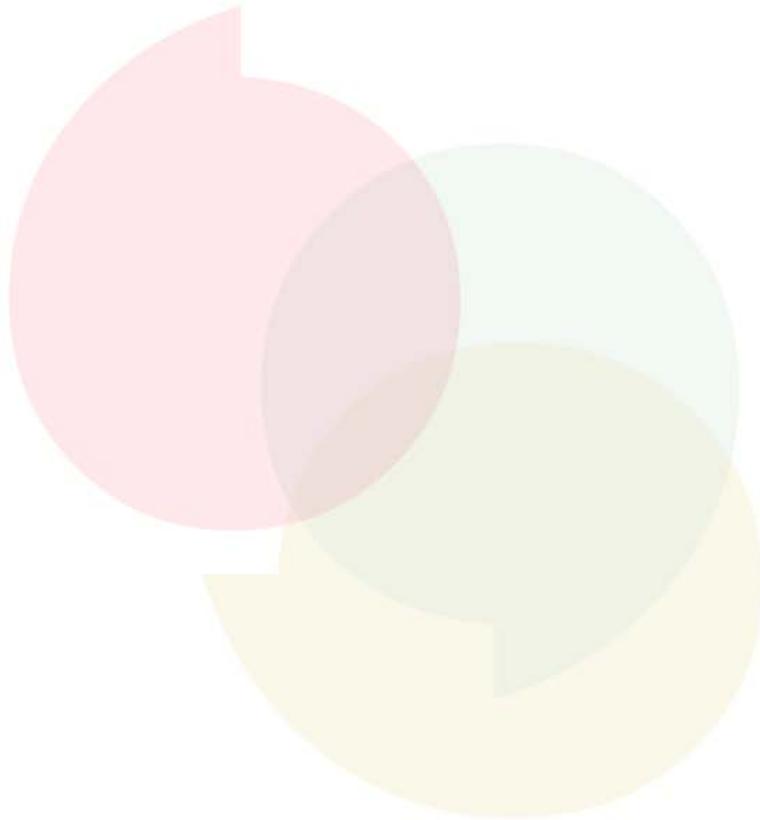
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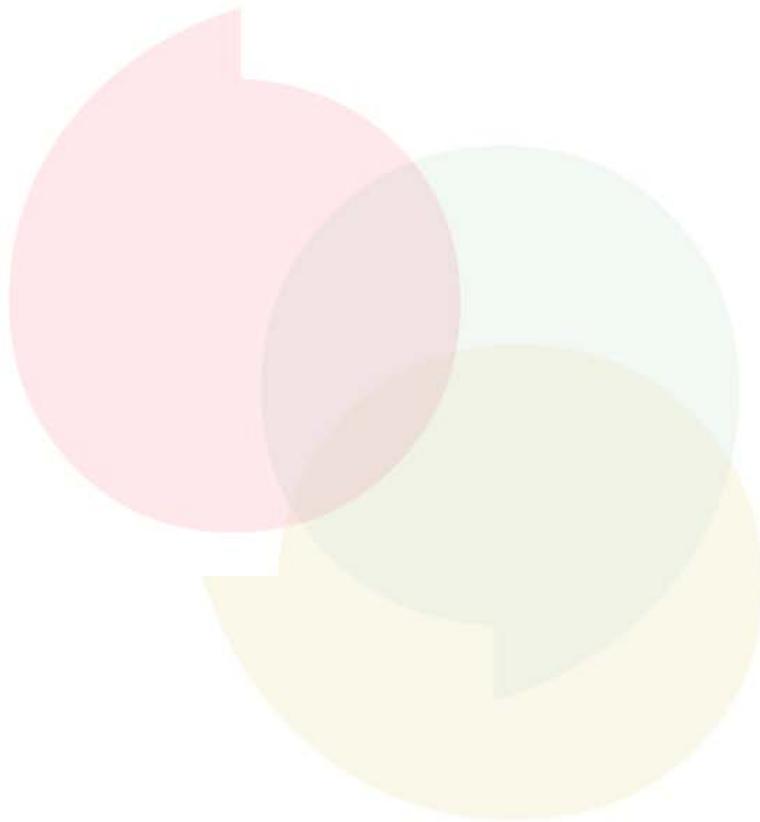
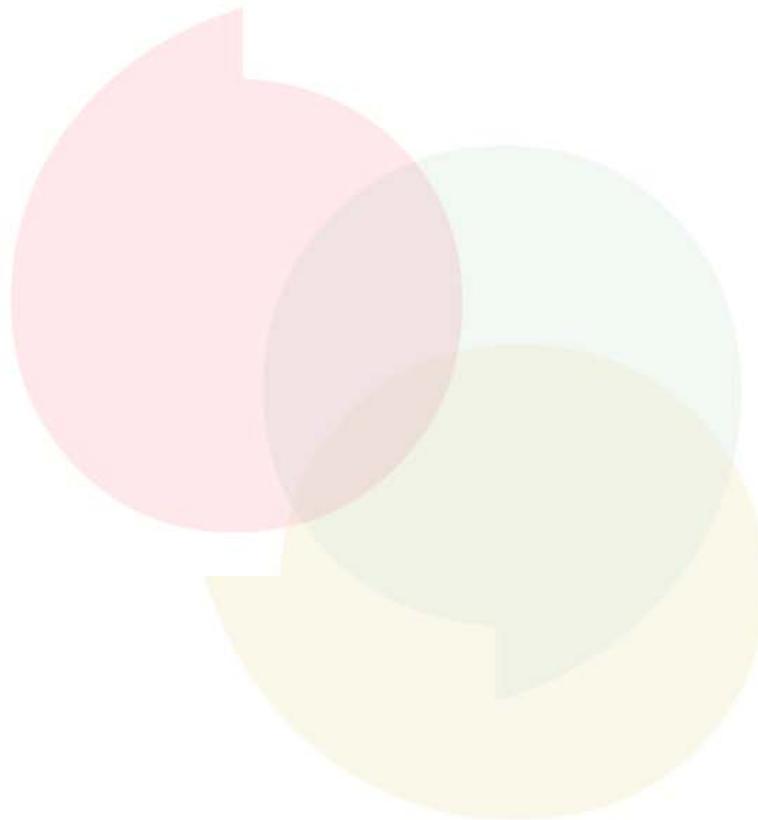


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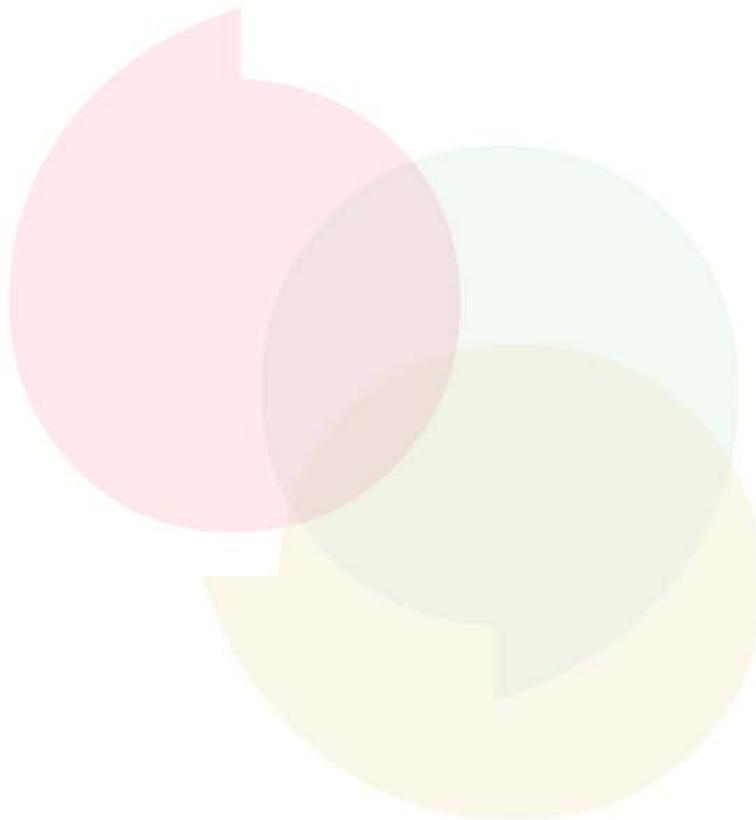


List of Abbreviations

USR – University Social Responsibility

HE - Higher education

ICT – Information Communication Technologies



1. INTRODUCTION

Manifesto Guidelines and Internal Notes

It is a public declaration of principles and intentions. It is an attempt to develop a shared understanding, some shared reasons and, mainly, shared knowledge of practice on USR.

It is intended to be a tool to help shape the debate around USR and facilitating awareness, drawing on our in-depth and practical knowledge of the challenges that faced by the key actors of HE sector. As a bold and outstanding declaration that a group of people, united by a common vision and a common goal, launch to the public in order to explain what they stand for and are willing to work, sharing values and objectives, identifying a way forward and containing a proposal for a strong and alternative model to the dominant one as well as pledging to play by certain rules. It is thought as the result of our collective experience and efforts to “unthink” and co-construct an innovative vision and methodology to enhance and promote social impact in HE institutions.

Considering the sustainability orientation of the EU-USR project – not replicating structures of other existing networks on USR and bringing added value to existing networks – this manifesto proposes to approach the issue in a framework of a “Fellowship” or “Membership” instead of a “Network”. This proposal aims to clarify the EU-USR networking purposes without colliding with existing networks on USR or other consolidated inter-Universities “agendas”, whose engagement may be of great importance for the sustainability of the EU-USR outcomes.

“Membership” is an alternative given by Claudio, considering Fellowship might be more related to individuals than institutions. Network, Fellowship, Membership, Partnership or another term is a decision the project partners needs to take in view of the EU-USR strategy and change the text below accordingly, among other improvements to be made.

This draft manifesto is intended to be a text for, firstly, the project partnership validation and, secondly, for our stakeholders validation during the several surveying actions foreseen in the project. It should therefore be considered a work in progress, both internally and externally.

2. EU-USR FELLOWSHIP MANIFESTO

Social dimension of higher education, which was absent in the genesis of the Bologna Declaration in 1999, became a central issue in the Ministerial declarations of London (2007) and Leuven (2009). Even if much of the current discussion surrounding university social responsibility presents it as a “new” topic, it emerged from the work around corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the recent renewed EU strategy 2011-2014 for CSR, where the European Commission presents an even wider definition of CSR as “the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society”, including “maximizing the creation of shared value” and “identifying preventing and mitigating their possible adverse impacts”.

On the other hand, the social role of higher education is not a new issue in itself, since in all countries, with different emphasis, the contribution of higher education institutions to social development is recognized and the UNESCO declaration of 1998 (World Declaration on Higher Education for the twenty-century: vision and action) puts the issue in great evidence.

We believe higher education institutions, as public services, have a social function and they should include social responsibility references in their mission, vision and strategy, in a way that it has a real impact on all their activities and actions: teaching, research, transfer, and management (Larrán et al, 2012). In the same direction, the core mission of higher education institutions in promoting competence development in its students cannot ignore the fact that competence implies a complex combination of knowledge, capacity, communication and social impact (OECD, 2009) where ethics should play a central role in all higher education activities, internally and externally.

Testifying the growing enrolment rates in higher education institutions in Europe in the past decades, at the same time as we observe negative correlations between the highest levels of education and significant awareness to fundamental values of democratic societies (Carvalho, 2013), the role of higher education institutions in promoting shared universal values that transcend culture, ideology and even curricula, becomes an even more relevant priority.

The EU-USR Fellowship recognizes the growing importance of promoting social and civic skills in higher education students as part of and transversally to any curriculum, as they are foundational to their comprehensive development as integral persons, committed to apply the acquired knowledge and technical capacities to the higher good of their communities’ wellbeing.

In this context, the founding and member institutions of the EU-USR Fellowship commit to a European management approach that promotes social responsibility in higher education in a long term perspective. Moreover, these members recognize the key role of higher education institutions in contributing to their local communities’ social development and sustainability, by setting the example of responsible management, civic participation and positive social impact, being an inspiration for others to do the same.

We do not believe that a single model of developing USR would fit any higher education institution, irrespective of its nature, size and context, the EU-USR, therefore the EU-USR Fellowship commits to share access to a generic framework for reflection and continuing

collaborative improvement, based on specific, tested and validated tools that increase the higher education sector performance in social responsibility.

Instead of aiming to create a new network on social responsibility, the EU-USR Fellowship shall concentrate its efforts in bridging existing networks and similar organizations in the USR field, benchmarking best practices at an international collaboration setting and bringing increased capacity by providing added-value ICT based operational tools to support them in their social responsibility endeavours and investments.

By systematizing and sharing best practices on USR amongst its members, the EU-USR Fellowship will continuously aim to promote the reflection on the higher education social responsibility, helping them to identify, analyse and structure the information in order to achieve and implement responsible and sustainable management processes.

We believe that EU Universities can contribute to international debate and concrete developments in the field of USR by sharing the experience they gained in balanced international collaboration in the frame of the so-called Bologna Process.

The EU-USR Fellowship therefore commits to share information, understanding and motivations to promote the debate around social responsibility in higher education and facilitating awareness at their institutions, drawing on the Fellowship's in-depth and practical knowledge of the challenges faced by the key actors of the higher education sector.

