# Project Information

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Executive Summary

Though not a strong feature of the original Bologna Joint Ministerial Declaration of the European Ministers of Education (1999) that created the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) the social dimension of higher education became a central issue in subsequent Declarations, which recognised the important influence higher education institutions (HEIs) exert on developing European society and defining and transmitting the values on which this is built.

UNESCO underlines the current importance of such a contribution: “At no time in human history was the welfare of nations so closely linked to the quality and outreach of their higher education systems and institutions” (World Conference on Higher Education Partners, June 2003). The Council of Europe emphasises public responsibility for higher education and the importance of higher education governance in developing and promoting the social dimension of higher education and its distinctive contribution to the values of modern, complex society. In short, in their different ways the relevant supra-national bodies all emphasise the social responsibilities of higher education.

Currently, most European universities seem sensitive to and aware of the importance of their “social dimension” to some degree or other and many are developing actions to make this a priority, not only in policy terms but also in daily practice. However, there is no effective framework that can support this process within the EHEA. The project reported on here was developed to fill this gap and to create a Community Reference Framework for University Social Responsibility across the EHEA.

The EU-USR project was thus conceived from the outset as making a major contribution to the development and promotion of the social dimension of the European Higher Education.

In pursuit of this, two complementary epistemological frameworks were utilized, informing the integrated series of the Project’s work packages. First, University Social Responsibility was treated as the focus of inquiry, with desk-research identifying and analyzing examples of interesting policy and practice in fifteen selected European countries and a series of interviews, focus groups and five benchmarking visits carried out. This work allowed us to develop an operational definition of University Social Responsibility (Work Package [WP] 2), a directory of examples of interesting current practice and a set of Benchmark Standards (WP 3). Together, these outputs provide a reference point for not only further research and analysis but also for the further development of University Social Responsibility policy and practice across the EHEA. In addition, for any university seeking to develop its approach to University Social Responsibility ab initio, a simple analytical tool has been developed (WP 4) that will help translate the outcomes from a gap analysis into the basis of an institutional strategic plan for University Social Responsibility.

However, this project also has a normative dimension. It proposes a Manifesto (WP 6) that reflects the ethical and social commitments underpinning the project and that is presented as a key means of securing support from a wide range of individuals, institutions and other bodies in order to help advance University Social Responsibility as a distinctive feature of the EHEA landscape in a systematic, sector-wide manner. The Manifesto is linked to proposals for developing this process by means of a virtual network (WP 5).
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1. Project Objectives

The EU-USR Project was conceived as a response to the policy priority of the European Commission about the need for a common social responsibility strategy for all European universities. In this context, the EU-USR project creates a Common European Reference Framework to enhance social responsibility of universities in a long-term perspective. To this end, the project uses a bottom-up approach, which starts from an examination of the practice and experience in the field of USR across the EU member states.

The main purpose of the project was to create a European framework that allows the development of networking between European universities in terms of social responsibility, to enhance university social action and impact by exchanging experience on policy and practices in areas such as

- Organisational governance
- Labour practices
- The environment
- Fair operating practices
- Consumer issues
- Community involvement and development
- Human rights and democratic citizenship.

The key innovative contribution of the EU-USR project is found in its holistic approach and its addressing the need for a comprehensive framework that addresses the issues, problems and needs of each EU region as well as those of Europe as a whole, together with creating something that will have meaning and significance at local institutional level as well as at regional, national and European levels.

The main project objectives are:

- A fit-for-purpose definition of University Social Responsibility (USR) for the EHEA
- Identification, analysis and presentation of interesting current practice in the sphere of USR
- Creation of a set of Benchmark Standards for USR across the EHEA as the foundation of an open benchmarking system
- A strategy for mainstreaming the approach at the centre of the outcomes and outputs from the project.
2. Project Approach

The approach adopted comprised seven Work Packages (WPs) each with specific aims:

1. MANAGEMENT & COORDINATION
   - Ensuring project deliverables are delivered on time through efficient day to day running of the project
   - Managing consortium communication and contacts with the EACEA

2. USR BEST1 PRACTICES
   - Identification of the programmes and actions related to University Social Responsibility in a selection of universities across Europe
   - Collection and analyses of examples of good practice concerning development and implementation of University Social Responsibility.
   - Conducting a diagnostic analysis of these examples

3. BENCHMARKING:
   - Design and development of a project-wide approach to Benchmarking
   - Development of a framework for a series of Benchmarking Visits and overall management of these (5) visits
   - Creation, application and refinement of a set of Benchmark Standards for University Social Responsibility across the EHEA

4. VALIDATION of the IDEA of BENCHMARK STANDARDS FOR USR
   - Development of the framework for a series of focus groups and interviews in relation to the proposed Benchmark Standards and their potential applications
   - Analysis of the outcomes of these consultations
   - Production of a simple gap analysis tool to help Universities new to USR identify ways to take USR forward

5. DISSEMINATION AND MAINSTREAMING:
   - Design and delivery of promotional kit
   - 5 project eNewsletters
   - Project website and web 2.0 community

6. SUSTAINABILITY & IMPACT MAXIMISATION:
   - Involvement of key stakeholders at the EU and at the national level
   - Design of a network for the development and valorisation of University Social Responsibility

7. QUALITY & EVALUATION
   - Evaluation and quality assurance
   - Design and implementation of tools for monitoring, improving the quality of the project

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1 Initially, it was intended that “good” and “best” practice was identified. However, as the implementation of the project proceeded, it was decided that – given the complexity and diversity of higher education and the communities and societies in services across the EHEA it would be more appropriate to use the term “interesting current practice”.
3. Project Outcomes & Results

3.1 WHAT IS UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY?

José Pedro Amorim, Thiago Freires, Ema Loja, Fernanda Rodrigues, Joaquim Luís Coimbra, Isabel Menezes, Universidade do Porto, PT

The social dimension of higher education emerged as a central concern of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the Ministerial Declarations of London (2007) and Leuven (2009), with an emphasis on equality of opportunity in terms of students’ access and progression. However, the idea that the mission of universities includes dimensions beyond the promotion of knowledge and research, concerns with students’ personal and professional development and the promotion of critical and engaged citizenship correspond to the archetypal model of the European university (Zgaga, 2009).

Only recently however have these concerns been labelled as University Social Responsibility (USR) (e.g. Larrán, López & Márquez, 2011), with the multiple connotations that this term implies. In this project, our departure point was a very basic definition incorporating elements of inclusion, social justice, citizenship and environmental sustainability.

Much of the debate on the importance of USR appears to be based on motives that range from academic excellence and integrity to equality of opportunities, even if it is no doubt also a consequence of the growing marketization of higher education (e.g., Sultana, 2011) and the formation of a European education space (Nóvoa & Lawn, 2002). Nejati et al. (2011), in an analysis of university websites, identified areas related to organizational governance (e.g., accountability), labour practices (e.g., well-being), concerns with human rights and the environment, fairness of operating practices (e.g., involvement of the public) and in regard to students’ issues (e.g., access to information), as well as a focus on community involvement and development.

Nevertheless, Eurydice reports from 1999 and 2011 on the social dimension, defined as equality of opportunities for access of underrepresented groups in higher education, show a huge diversity of policies and practices across countries and conclude that this has not become “a significant driver for higher education policy” in Europe (eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/Eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/131EN.pdf p. 62).

However, in the last two decades, there have been relevant efforts on the part of various international bodies, to clarify possible definitions, policies and practices that could be integrated under the umbrella term of USR. These include ISO 26000 (The International Standards Organisation’s “Guidelines on Social Responsibility”); the UNESCO 1998 “World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century” reinforced in the UNESCO 2009 “Communique from the World Conference on Higher Education: The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development”; the Council of Europe’s 2006 “Declaration on the Responsibility of Higher Education for a Democratic Culture - Citizenship, Human Rights and Sustainability”; and the European Commission’s 2011 “Renewed EU Strategy 2011-14 for Corporate Social Responsibility”.
Our review of these various sources led us to define USR as the responsibilities of universities for the impacts of their decisions and activities on society and the environment through transparent and ethical strategies. We understand such practices should be promoted and encouraged among students and staff, in a way that celebrates and promotes the values of justice, equality, participative democracy, social responsibility and sustainability. Also, there is concern that USR “contributes to sustainable development including the health and welfare of society; recognizes expectations from stakeholders; complies with applicable law and international norms of behaviour; and accords with the relevant norms of transparency and public accountability” (Martin, 2013). Considering this scenario and based in an analysis of USR policies and practices in Europe, our project therefore proposes Benchmark Standards for University Social Responsibility that cover four different areas: (1) research, teaching, support for learning and public engagement; (2) governance; (3) environmental and societal sustainability, and (4) fair practices.

The findings from the desk and field research carried out in this project show clearly that professors, researchers, board members, staff, students and others all value and recognize the significance of USR, considering it as a central feature of the work of European Higher Education Institutions. Yet they also recognize that a further step has to be taken with regard to the development of policy and practice and that should take into account the specifics of each HEI, its context, history and mission. It is in this sense that we hope that our definition can inform and support HEIs in taking this step and positively impacting on the lives of students, teachers, staff and communities.

3.2 MAPPING CURRENT UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PRACTICES IN EUROPE

Thiago Freires, José Pedro Amorim, Ema Loja, Joaquim Luís Coimbra, Fernanda Rodrigues, Isabel Menezes, Universidade do Porto, PT

At the outset of the EU-USR research project we aimed to get a broad and deep understanding of University Social Responsibility (USR) in Europe through the identification, collection and analysis of ‘interesting practice’.

The various teams initiated a systematic search in 15 European Union countries, from diverse geographical locations (northern, central, eastern and southern), to identify practices of USR that were either mentioned in the literature or by relevant actors as potentially interesting examples. Documentary analysis was then performed to characterize each practice in more detail, with practices analysed according to their thematic focus, taking into consideration the core dimensions of social responsibility mentioned in ISO 26000: organizational governance; human rights; labour practices; the environment; fair operating practices; consumer issues; and community involvement and development.

Additionally, the analysis also involved a consideration of elements that might justify why something could be considered as interesting practice – such as scale of operation, internal assessment, international/national reputation, transferability, quality assurance in place, degree of innovation, duration, prospective vision and recognition. All teams completed a case record that included a brief description. The information was, whenever possible, based on various sources (e.g., websites, strategic plans, evaluation papers, media news, research reports, etc.).
These records were then subject to secondary analysis involving tabulation by geographical area, thematic focus and the elements qualifying the practice as ‘interesting’. Word analysis was then carried out with QSR NVivo 10; a matrix with ISO 26000 core subjects and the UNESCO 1998 “World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century”. Finally, a selection was made of case studies with the collection of additional data on a smaller group of USR practices (19), again with the involvement of the various partners.

A total of 40 types of practice were identified. Our thematic analysis reveals that ‘community involvement and development’ is the most frequent focus of ten cases, including universities of northern, central, eastern and southern Europe. The second most frequent thematic focus is ‘the environment’, addressed by nine universities especially from central and southern Europe. ‘Human rights’ follows with eight projects mainly in southern universities, followed by seven projects on ‘organizational governance’. Practices in relation to ‘labour practices’, ‘fair operating practices’, ‘consumer issues’ and ‘policies related to gender equality’ were less frequent. Three universities from central Europe had USR curricula incorporating courses on Corporate Social Responsibility in their regular programmes.

A word frequency analysis reveals that ‘development’, ‘education’, ‘social’ and ‘community’ are the most frequent terms used in the projects’ descriptions. University Social Responsibility thus appears mainly linked to development, education and the community, but ‘research’ and ‘training’ emerge as important areas as well – suggesting the specificities of higher education contexts. The projects usually focus on notions of sustainability, environment and human rights and most of them incorporate aspects of innovation, cooperation and involvement.

The analysis also reveals that the most frequent elements of interesting practice are ‘transferability’ (34 cases), ‘international/ national reputation or visibility’ (30 cases), ‘degree of innovation’ (24 cases) and ‘scale of operation’ (20 cases). On the other hand, ‘available evaluation of results or impact’ and ‘quality assurance in place’ feature in only 15 and 14 cases, respectively – while not surprising, this suggests that higher education institutions should become more concerned with the evaluation of the outcomes and impact of USR practices, as a necessary contribution to the formal, systematic institutionalization of USR policies and practices.
3.3 THE IDEA OF A SET OF BENCHMARK STANDARDS FOR UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Brian Martin, University of Edinburgh Joint Unions (UoEJU), UK

It was not originally intended that the project would develop a new set of sector specific Benchmark Standards for University Social Responsibility across the EHEA. The idea emerged some six months into the work, largely as a consequence of it becoming clear that not only there was a huge diversity of levels of commitment and approaches to and practices in the field of University Social Responsibility, but also, as already stated, that there was no common reference framework that could be used to approach this diversity.

The directory of cases produced as the key output from Work Package 2 highlighted the general absence of anything like a coherent policy framework or explicit standards for University Social Responsibility, at either European or national levels. This picture was reinforced by the preliminary work undertaken for the Benchmarking Visits.

This was despite the facts that

(a) it was relatively easy to identify in most countries some examples of interesting current practice in several aspects of University Social Responsibility and

(b) there is no shortage of rhetoric in relation to the social responsibilities of universities, this including a multitude of claims made by universities themselves, not to mention implicit and explicit imperatives expressed in policy discourse at both national and European levels.

In reviewing such existing standards schemes as do exist, most were deemed either too generic to be of use to the sector and/or too cumbersome to appeal to a sector which sees itself as already burdened by regulation and reporting requirements or, in the few instances where standards schemes are sector-specific, perhaps too narrowly focused on environmental issues, to the exclusion of the societal dimension of University Social Responsibility.

The International Standards Organisation’s Guidelines on Social Responsibility (ISO 26000, 2010) attracted our attention from an early stage as a potential reference point in that ISO 26000 is global in orientation and intended to apply across sectors and to organisations of various sizes and complexity. It is also clear in respect of principles and values, in a way that we believe is compatible with the nature of the European Higher Education sector.

Of course, we were keen to ensure that the specifics of the European university would be addressed in any new set of sector-specific Standards developed from ISO 26000 and drew therefore on the relevant policy statements and work of the EU itself, of the Council of Europe and a wide range of other sources, to create and trial and test through a series of benchmarking visits the Benchmark Standards for University Social Responsibility across the EHEA as set out in the following pages.
The resultant Standards cover the generic range of social responsibility concerns set out in ISO 26000 but through a set of criteria developed to align with that the nature of the European higher education sector, its distinctive history, values and mission and the public expectations associated with it. They also foreground the particular obligations that European universities have in relation to social responsibility in teaching, support for learning, research and public understanding in a way that we hope presents the prospect of social responsibility becoming a distinctive or core competence of the EHEA, going forward.

3.4 IS THERE SUPPORT FOR A SET OF BENCHMARK STANDARDS FOR UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN EUROPE?

*Carmen Osuna, Aurora Megaides*  
Fundación General Universidad de Granada Empresa, ES

The idea of a set of sector-specific Benchmark Standards and two different versions of the Standards (as they were developed over the course of a period of some twelve months) were subject to consultation. The rationale for the consultations carried out was to ensure that the idea itself was deemed sensible, that the Standards were seen as relevant, that their coverage was regarded as comprehensive enough and that they were seen by a cross-section of stakeholders as usable and useful. In addition, they consultations were used to gather impartial views of the way in which the Benchmark Standards were developing and to inform subsequent iterations of them.

First, between November 2013 and March 2014, in tandem with the Benchmarking Visits, four of the partners carried out interviews or focus group discussions at local, institutional or national levels in their own countries.

Second, in January 2014, a focus group was held in Brussels for representatives from a number of pan-European organizations active in the sphere of higher education.

These consultations were modest in nature both in terms of the number of participants and the range of questions explored. However, they produced interesting and useful results, particularly in terms of commentary on the idea of a set of Benchmark Standards and in respect of suggestions as to elements within the Standards that seemed to the consultees to merit enhancement, to emphasise their importance, and a few suggested additions.

The most important result however was unequivocal endorsement of the idea of a set of Benchmark Standards for University Social Responsibility, across Europe. Against this, consultees at the institutional, regional and national levels commented on three core issues, as follows.

- **Benchmark Standards coherence with University missions, values and activities.**

The project’s working definition presented USR as “a heterogeneous range of policies, strategies and practices undertaken voluntarily by universities in order to contribute to social, cultural, economic and environmental well-being. It is focused on positive outcomes for and positive impacts on community and society”. Consultees complemented this definition by distinguishing USR as
• A means for the promotion of citizenship values and sustainable growth, which implies that USR actions are directed to modify values, attitudes and behaviours of by raising awareness of issues such as sustainable development, gender equality, energy saving, etc.
• A mandatory mission for the Universities, assuming that since the education is a public good, HEIs have a specific commitment to society and, thus, USR should not be regarded as wholly voluntary but some aspects should be mandatory. Related to this, some interviewees identified USR as a quality threshold that Universities should meet.
• A diverse but coherent range of policies and practices approached from a commitment to transparency and accountability.

❖ Steps in the implementation of a USR strategy

In the process of consultation, a three-step process emerged as being characteristic of a typical university’s trajectory in developing its approach to USR:

- First step: Knowing
- Second step: Raising Awareness and Convincing
- Third Step: Compromising and Involving.

According to this view, most European Universities find themselves in the second stage as they have already recognised the relevance of being socially responsible. In this stage, social responsibility is already an object of concern for university management and there may be specific organizational responsibility for the coordination and implementation of USR policies, strategies and actions, despite the fact that many consultees noted the implementation USR activities without a USR policy.

The third stage, compromising and involving, is reached when USR becomes a transversal issue, and is fully integrated into the very fabric of the university, with all involved to some degree or other, with social change being a priority and students placed in the centre.

❖ Main drivers and barriers of University Social Responsibility

In relation to the main drivers, consultees emphasised the importance of stakeholder engagement and, with respect to the main barriers, most stakeholders emphasised the limitations caused by the lack of financial resource.

Stakeholders were also asked about their opinions in relation to the main drivers and barriers for the implementation of University Social Responsibility Strategy at institutional level. In relation to the main drivers, they emphasised the importance of stakeholder engagement. With respect to the main barriers, several consultees emphasised the lack of resources. Other main drivers and barriers are presented in Figure 1.
In both consultation exercises, those consulted endorsed the general approach taken and the thrust of the Standards.

Nevertheless, some suggestions were made as to aspects that could be improved, such as the need for more specific indicators and some account of national differences in including those affecting sectoral and organisational culture and pay and reward/incentive regimes. In addition, problems associated with the sector’s reluctance to accept additional regulatory or public reporting requirements, and dependence on endorsement of the Benchmark Standards by the relevant bodies at European, national and regional levels was noted.

In the European-level focus group consultation with representatives of six pan-European organisations active in the sphere of higher education, appreciation was expressed of the attempt the Project team was making to combine generic indicators of social responsibility, largely coming from the corporate world, with the discourse on social responsibility found both within higher education itself and in such sources as UNESCO Declarations, the various documents associated with the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process, and the views of the Council of Europe, which stress higher-order values informing, and a broader scope to, USR than to CSR. Informants expressed a strong, uniform view that Corporate Social Responsibility should not be a model for universities, given the different value orientations, but might be used as a reference point against which commonalities and differences could be identified.

Finally, the concrete aspects of the EU-USR project (collection and analysis of good practice, benchmarking and community building among “social responsibility” people in universities) were commended and strong encouragement was given to complete the development of the Benchmark Standards by further enhancing the specific characteristics of higher education and of the European university’s contribution to social responsibility, as both a values-oriented concept and as a set of practices.
Following the decision to create a set of sector-specific Benchmark Standards, these were developed incrementally through a series of five benchmarking visits that took place across an eight-month period. The visits started on a relatively modest basis and their scope and rigor was expanded as the series unfolded and the Draft Standards were further developed. At the same time, the range of practice evidence examined was incrementally extended and a wider range of key informants invited to participate in the visits.

As it turned out, the programme of visits started with one to an institution whose approach to University Social Responsibility could be positioned at the “less developed” end of a continuum and ended with one to an institution that could be positioned at the “well developed” end, presenting an excellent opportunity for both the progression of the project team’s thinking and the gradual development of our approach and of the reference criteria themselves. By the end of the series of Benchmarking Visits, these had become version 9 of a full set of Benchmark Standards for University Social Responsibility in the EHEA. Further development work and the contributions made in consultations after the conclusion of the Benchmarking Visits resulted in version 15, the final version produced as a result of this Project, as published in this Chapter.

The single most significant development in the process of developing the Benchmark Standards was the decision to create ab initio a completely new Standard, covering Research, Teaching, Support for Learning and Public Engagement, that addresses social responsibility in the core activities of the typical European university.

The broad aim set in the Project Proposal for the Benchmarking Visits was that they would “allow for comparative analysis in situ of plans, methodologies and activities in the sphere of USR” in specific institutions. As the Project developed and given the decision to develop a set of sector-specific Benchmark Standards, the nature of the Benchmarking Visits shifted from (a) being primarily an extension of the work reported on in 3 above, furthering and deepening the collection of examples of current practice in order to derive from these a set of Benchmarks on a norm-referenced basis to (b) testing the Project’s own criterion-referenced Draft Benchmark Standards against policy and practice in the case institutions that were the focus of the Benchmarking Visits.

Inevitably, the approach adopted meant that the focus of the Benchmarking Visits was primarily on the exploratory and formative application of the (Draft) Benchmark Standards themselves to the case institution rather than on evaluation of the institutional policy and practice itself.

In any case, the assumption underlying the original conceptualization of the project that Benchmarks could be derived from the Benchmarking Visits by means of identifying “good” practice in the institutions visited proved impossible to realize. This was due to the wide variability across the institutions visited in terms of definitions of USR and in the general “state of the art” regarding University Social Responsibility, which is at a very early stage of development across the EHEA as a whole, notwithstanding the progress that has been made by some ‘early-adopters’ and a degree of maturity in policy and practice that has been attained by a few.
Thus, the orientation shifted from a norm-referencing (or “best practice”) approach to benchmarking to a criterion-referencing approach, informed by the notion of Core Competencies ie unique characteristics or abilities that cannot be easily imitated, a notion consistent with the long history of formal, university-based higher education in Europe and the distinctive characteristics of this.

At the same time, all the evidence we accessed suggests that a particular type of benchmarking is required, going forward, ie an adaptive form of Internal Benchmarking, that is one that would operate at a sectoral level and be of an essentially collaborative nature. This notion is further developed in Section 3.6 below which sets out ideas for the collaborative sharing of experience and information consistent with the notion of some form of network, as envisaged in the Manifesto.

The Benchmark Standards that follow are therefore presented as providing a Common Reference Framework for University Social Responsibility across the European Higher Education Area, consistent with USR being a Core Competence of European universities collectively.

There are four Standards, each of which is specified in its own set of criteria.

1. Research, Teaching, Support for Learning and Public Engagement

The institution's core academic activities are underpinned by the values and principles of social responsibility. In order to ensure this, the institution:

1.1 Guarantees academic freedom for its staff and students.
1.2 Widens and diversifies access to education within a commitment to lifelong learning.
1.3 Manages student admissions in a transparent and equitable way, using explicit criteria to inform selection decisions, providing formative feedback to unsuccessful candidates.
1.4 Ensures that public funds provided to support teaching and student fees are used for the purpose for which they are provided.
1.5 Requires that its curricula are informed by socially responsible, ethical research and that its graduate attributes incorporate evidence-based thinking and decision-making, active citizenship and employability.
1.6 Adopts a learner-centred approach to teaching and student support, ensuring assessment and feedback is used to promote learning.
1.7 Facilitates collaborative and independent learning that goes beyond the classroom and into the community.
1.8 Enables international collaboration and supports student and staff cross-national mobility.
1.9 Enforces ethical protocols for research, teaching and related activities.
1.10 Facilitates dialogue between the research community, the public and policymakers to link research to 'real world' issues.
1.11 Improves its contribution to society through open access to research outcomes and its public engagement activities.

2. Governance

The principles of social responsibility are respected throughout institutional policy, strategy, procedures and processes. They permeate all levels, as an integral element of management accountability and stakeholder engagement. The institution
2.1 Encourages a culture of social responsibility with high ethical and professional standards and clear protocols to avoid conflict of interest.

2.2 Formally recognises staff and student unions and involves them as partners in governance and decision-making, providing for their representation on the Board (or equivalent) and on its advisory committees.

2.3 Ensures that social responsibility is treated as a core commitment by the Board and senior management and that the institution’s social responsibility performance is the focus for annual evaluative reporting.

2.4 Exercises due diligence by assessing the risk and impact of all activities, ensuring compliance with the law, relevant standards and norms.

2.5 Conducts ethical and socially responsible investment and procurement, with comprehensive public reporting of criteria and decisions.

2.6 Is a responsible neighbour, facilitating dialogue and working in partnership with and investing in the local community.

2.7 Recognises its staff and student social responsibility initiatives through an internal reward scheme.

2.8 Actively participates in relevant social responsibility networks.

2.9 Reports on its progress towards clear and independently verified social responsibility and sustainability goals.

2.10 Publishes the outcomes of internal and external reviews, complaints, academic appeals and the source and use of all funding.

3. Environmental and Societal Sustainability

The institution is committed to environmental sustainability and biodiversity in all aspects of its operations, including in its use of goods, services and works and in its evaluation of decisions. It takes appropriate action to ensure that its commitments are realised and

3.1 Ensures its policies and practices minimise any negative impact on the environment caused by its activities or supply chain.

3.2 Promotes sustainable development.

3.3 Delivers a continuous improvement programme that works towards cleaner, sustainable, eco-efficient, resource efficient, zero waste and ethical operations including procurement.

3.4 Publishes regular environmental sustainability reports, incorporating risk and action assessments covering environmental, societal and supply chain risks.

3.5 Encourages the use of environmentally friendly technologies, and of energy efficient, reusable and biodegradable materials.

3.6 Practices socially responsible and sustainable procurement, publishes a code of ethical behaviour for procurement decision-making that includes workers’ rights and fair trade principles and promotes social responsibility and sustainability wherever it has influence over the supply chain.

3.7 Ensures respect for and compliance with internationally proclaimed human rights, the rule of law and national and International anti-corruption requirements.

3.8 Ensures that all its International activities promote human and societal development and, where possible, help address the issues of poverty, quality of life, advance peace and promote conflict resolution.
4. Fair Practices

The institution ensures equality and fairness for its staff, students, and others as appropriate and its policies and procedures are intended to avoid discrimination or inequity. The institution

4.1 Promotes and celebrates pluralism and diversity, and ensures equality regardless of age, culture, ethnicity, gender or sexuality.

4.2 Practices open, transparent, fair and equitable recruitment and promotion of staff, using affirmative action where appropriate, providing comprehensive staff development that incorporates social responsibility.

4.3 Establishes through negotiation with staff unions comprehensive employee communication, consultation and negotiation protocols and implements these.

4.4 Promotes the health, safety, physical social and mental wellbeing of staff and students beyond minimum legal requirements.

4.5 Promotes equality of opportunity, guarantees equal, fair and just pay and equitable conditions, and proactively works to avoid inequality through flexible working and career development and progression opportunities.

4.6 Ensures that working conditions at least comply with relevant national laws, collective agreements and applicable International Labour Organisation standards and makes every effort to avoid casualisation of the workforce.

4.7 Guarantees freedom of association and respects collective bargaining.

4.8 Has transparent, fair and equitable complaints and disciplinary procedures and ensures that complaints and disciplinary matters are addressed swiftly and fairly.

4.9 Publishes the possible sanctions for a proven breach of ethical or related requirements and protects whistleblowers.

4.10 Provides professional support services to meet specific additional needs of students and staff as arising from a disability, for example.

4.11 Communicates with suppliers about its procurement policy and uses research to inform its procurement decisions.

3.6 THE EU-USR COMMON REFERENCE FRAMEWORK AS A COLLABORATIVE AND KNOWLEDGE-ORIENTED SYSTEM

Lourenço Xavier de Carvalho, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, PT

The EU-USR project had the main goal of establishing a preliminary model and standards to identify and support recognition and improvement of the Social Responsibility in HE institutions. It has, therefore, developed a set of instruments with potential to build a collaborative and knowledge oriented system that allows permanent and self-sustained screening of USR interesting practices, which raises awareness and increases USR capacity across the Higher Education sector in Europe.

The approach for the development and sustainability of the EU-USR results is based in the articulation of three domains – Collaboration, Knowledge Management and Technologies.
As one of the major post-project objectives, we define reinforcement of the sense of community among HEI, having USR interests as the common ground. Considering the purpose of achieving an integrated transnational view at the European level, collaborative systems are suitable to this context. Therefore, the EU-USR model and tools should be seen in the post-project phase as an integrated set of collaboration activities.

In a widely connected world, cooperation among external entities emerge as a key for success, meaning that acting together, gathering specialized competences, in a synergic way, to achieve mutual gains. By collaborating, knowledge acquisition from external sources is nurtured and could lead to higher levels of proficiency. However, the orchestration of external parties requires coordination methods that should combine formal and informal governance. Thus, an open governance model should be implemented to ensure peers participation and involvement. Complementing the collaborative setting of EU-USR a culture of trust among peers should be underlined. In the light of collaboration management, human dimension is an essential factor to aggregate cooperative efforts between external partners. We consider important to emphasize the role of social capital as a major factor to promoter an enabling environment for sharing and learning. Trust is an indispensable condition to nurture a collaborative context.

Another key driver to EU-USR development and sustainability in the future lies in the capacity of transforming EU-USR outcomes in a management system for USR screening and assessment, which may be seen as a system that processes data, applies an agreed informational model and produces knowledge (impacting HE policies). The strategic value of a collaborative system is directly connected with a strategy of knowledge management, related to the construction of processes of acquisition of knowledge from external sources, combination and diffusion of knowledge. In this perspective of EU-USR sustainability model, knowledge management must meet the nature of collective learning, which implies a challenge of access to external sources, the ability to understand these sources (knowledge absorption) and the transfer of knowledge generated for the USR community. The proposed
The third dimension of knowledge management model follows the logic of knowledge spiral (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), despite conferring a greater emphasis on combination and externalization of knowledge.

The third dimension consists in an envisaged infrastructure that supports the functional model explained – web technology. The Internet is the most rapid technological adoption of our history and social technologies, in particular, widespread at an unparalleled pace. The impact of these technologies on communication (ease of exchange of semi-structured data and even knowledge), community (foster interactions in groups) and cooperation (accomplish tasks jointly and synchronously) are crucial.

When USR initiatives may be gathered and registered in a USR Database and a collaborative workflow system has been put in place to support the screening and assessment process, a web based workflow will be crucial to the orchestration of competences between different stakeholders. The technology strategy here implicit includes the development of automatic suggestions of initiatives related to an explicit search result. Thus, after an initiative search result, the web system should suggest others from the USR Database that could be somewhat related, following a Web 3.0 logic. Semantic engine functionality would give more visibility to related initiatives.

Overall, sustainability of the results of the EU-USR project is anchored, first of all, in an integrated view of collaboration, knowledge management and technology. It is clear that sustainability should be founded by an articulated strategy involving transfer of created knowledge and gathering of collaborative tasks in an effective way.

The environment of knowledge-sharing initiated during the project, supported by an envisaged EU-USR information system, would facilitate the mobilisation of peers and reinforced the sense of community.

Integrated in such a collaborative and knowledge oriented system for sustainability, the EU-USR Manifesto 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 to facilitate development, drawing on our in-depth, practical knowledge of the challenges that are faced by the key actors of HE sector. As a bold declaration that a group of people, united by a common vision and a common goal, launch in order to explain what they stand for and are willing to work towards, sharing values and objectives, identifying a way forward and containing a proposal for a strong and alternative model as well as pledging to play by certain rules. It is the result of our collective experience and efforts to “unthink” and co-construct an innovative vision and methodology to enhance and promote the positive social impact that Europe’s universities can have.
4. Partnerships

All organizations participating in this project are active – in line with the UN Global Compact Institutional Commitment on Responsible Management Education (EEP) of June 2008 – in the field of social responsibility, sustainability and business ethics and committed to USR in the academic curriculum, in the corresponding lines of research and in the enhanced engagement of Europe’s universities with community and society.

The University Politehnica of Bucharest, as project leader, is deeply committed to the development of social responsibility initiatives at national level and to promote RSU as a key issue on the top of policy agenda of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Scientific Research and the Romanian Agency for Quality for Quality in Higher Education. The Fundación General Universidad de Granada-Empresa (University of Granada) and the International University of La Rioja together with Scienter España have been involved in major regional and national studies designed to promote a Spanish model of University Social Responsibility. The Universities of Edinburgh and Porto are involved in projects developing inter-institutional, trans-national collaboration on University Social Responsibility both within and beyond Europe.

The experience of working in a diverse multi-national partnership has required that we focus on creating a common ground, thus helping to ensure that the outputs from the project are likely to be ‘fit for purpose’ across the much wider diversity of the EHEA.

In the course of the project, all partners have addressed the efforts to reaching organizations, institutions and networks of organizations related to higher education in their own national and regional contexts so as to involve and engage them as actively as possible. As an example of this, in Spain, the University of Cadiz has acted as the perfect associated partner hosting a Benchmarking Visit and inviting the partnership to present the project outcomes at the 1st International conference on USR (Cadiz, ES, Feb 2014).

Figure 4: Plenary session organized by EU-USR within the 1st International conference on USR
5. Plans for the Future

The EU-USR partnership is working for the establishment of a lasting network of USR stakeholders interested in promoting the social responsibility of Universities in keeping with our vision, expressed in THE EU-USR MANIFESTO:

«
We, the signatories of this Manifesto that has been developed by the EU-USR Project co-funded by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union:

 Believe that the missions of all Universities are of public interest and what they do – in terms of teaching, research and public engagement – must reflect awareness of societal needs at local and global level and promote the values of equity, social cohesion, non-discrimination, inclusion, access and sustainability, allowing them to become examples of responsible management, civic participation, democracy and positive social impact, acting as an inspiration for others and for students in particular;

 Note that the social role of Universities is a concern of the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the European Union and others, and is an object of interest of several existing networks at international level, but also observe that awareness and implementation strategies are not equally developed in all countries and institutions, leaving many well intentioned actors in conditions of uncertainty and lack of practical support when they want to drive change in the direction of University Social Responsibility;

 Recognise the value that ISO 26000 may have in the development of University Social Responsibility, but also the need to adapt this when applied to institutions that already have a social mission, through their teaching, research and public engagement, and where students and staff have their right to be involved in governance, the development of policy and strategy, management and decision-making which promotes the common good;

 Understand that each University will have a different profile, objectives and expected achievements in the field of Social Responsibility, but also that reference standards may help to identify relevant areas and objectives to be achieved, as well as to structure collaboration;

 Propose new Benchmark Standards for University Social Responsibility, the product of analysis of a wide range of evidence, a series of benchmarking visits and consultations, and advocate the use of these Standards to benchmark, self-assess, peer review and exchange information and knowledge about USR policies, strategies and practices across the EHEA, to help move beyond declarations of principle and isolated good practice;

 Call for a new commitment from all relevant parties across Europe (policy makers, higher education stakeholders, existing university networks and individual Higher Education Institutions) to systematically work together in support of University Social Responsibility;

 Propose the creation of a European networking and community environment to provide focused advocacy, promote awareness and support the development of policy, strategy and practice through the sharing of information, exchange of knowledge and the development of a system of peer review.»
With the project itself now concluded, the partners re-state their commitment to extend the community of interest/practice that now exists in a modest form. In this, we will draw on the spontaneous and genuine interest in the project’s mission that has emerged over the past two years and which indicates that we are assisting a sensible shift in awareness about and action on University Social Responsibility. The contacts established during the project’s lifespan are expected to stay active after the end of the project, and form the nucleus of a virtual network that will extend and evolve through local, regional and European initiatives.
6. Contribution to EU policies

Reference has already been made in this report to several aspects of the Bologna Process and its related Accords, as a principal policy initiative of the EU in terms of higher education. As the Bologna Process has unfolded since 1999, its scope has increased and for the now forty-nine territories that comprise the Bologna-derived European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the social dimension of higher education has become a central concern.

The European Council’s Conclusions on the Social Dimension of Higher Education (June, 2013: 2013/C 168/02) draws attention to the pivotal role the Bologna Process has in terms of this social dimension. In doing so, it underlines the importance of the promotion of equity, social cohesion and active citizenship and high-level skills as key to improving employability, inclusion and personal fulfillment. In turn, it also highlights the importance of widening access to higher education, improving the quality, relevance, flexibility and attractiveness of courses through student-centred learning and high quality student support in achieving these objectives. In addition, it identifies a need to deepen understanding and engagement with the social dimension of higher education.

The project reported on in this publication is an attempt to respond to such imperatives in a way that presents a Common Reference Framework for University Social Responsibility across the EHEA, that is consistent with the Bologna Process and its related Accords and in line with the EU’s generic policies on Social Responsibility.

Brief mention has been made in this report of the European Commission’s Renewed EU Strategy 2011-14 for Corporate Social Responsibility (October 2011: COM (2011) 681 final) This defines Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) succinctly as "the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society" (op cit, page 6). The prime focus of the Commission’s Strategy is on for-profit enterprises ("business") and this is predicated on the idea that the development of CSR should be "led by enterprises themselves" (page 7) with public authorities creating light-touch voluntary policy measures and, only where necessary, complementary regulation. At the same time, it indicates that "many enterprises value the existence of principles and guidelines that are supported by the public authorities, to benchmark their own policies and performance" (ibid).

Amongst the key reference points for the Commission in the articulation of its position, aspirations and expectations are the ten principles of the UN Global Compact, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the ISO ‘s Guidance on Social Responsibility. These are referenced more specifically in the eighteen priority and eighteen other actions set out in the Strategy. Of these, the single most significant is that which places emphasis on "creating multi-stakeholder CSR platforms in a number of (industrial) sectors" as many of the other actions are based on this.

A March 2014 review by the Commission of progress on implementation of the actions notes that eighteen-month pilots in three (business) sectors commenced in summer 2013 and a fourth initiative, ICT4Society, was launched by the Commission itself in early 2014 (http://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/ict4society-multi-stakeholder-platform). In addition, some progress is noted in the same review on addressing social and environmental issues in public procurement, sustainable consumption in respect of physical resources, environmental performance, non-financial disclosure and on several aspects of human rights in the supply chain and on "responsible business" more generally.
Whilst many of these areas of action are relevant to the higher education sector, the only specific mentions of the sector are in relation to the priority action regarding "Financial Support for education and training projects on CSR under the EU Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action programmes (now superseded by ERASMUS+) and action to raise the awareness of education professionals and enterprises (sic)" and the related "other" actions of "Encouraging European Business Schools to sign UN Principles for Responsible Management" and "Explore opportunities for financing further research on CSR...". As of March 2014, one research project had been funded on Impact Measurement and Performance Management of CSR and its work completed and reported on (http://csr-impact-eu/documents.html), a seminar had been held on Youth Entrepreneurship, Volunteering and CSR and some projects supported under the Youth in Action Programme.

Thus, notwithstanding an imperative in the latter for the integration of CSR (sic), sustainable development and responsible citizenship into university curricula and the importance of high quality academic research to the development of policy and practice in the field of CSR, together with more general obligations in relation to several aspects of social responsibility either by virtue of their nature as public or quasi-public institutions, Social Responsibility in the European University Sector can be seen as under-developed by comparison with other sectors, despite fairly considerable attention having been given to environmental issues by the sector over recent decades, in at least some of the territories covered by the EHEA.

In this sense, the project reported on in this publication complements both the general approach adopted by the EU regarding social responsibility - that is that it is a sectoral matter for most part - and the existing specific benchmark targets and core indicators to be achieved by 2020 across a number of aspects of education. It does this by providing the foundation in its Benchmark Standards for University Social Responsibility across the EHEA for measurement, assessment and evidencing progress and attainment at institutional level in a way that is compatible with the essentially autonomous nature of higher education institutions whilst at the same time being mindful of the considerable amount of public funding and other support that these institutions benefit from. The Common Reference Framework represented by the Benchmark Standards is thus one primarily focused on self-assessment and continuous (self-) improvement. It is thus consistent with the thrust of EU policy on Social Responsibility.

At the same time, it provides opportunity for the further development of evidence-based policy and practice in the specific sphere of University Social Responsibility (USR as distinct from CSR), recognising the distinctive nature of the European University and the distinctive contribution it can make to the wider social responsibility agenda by exemplifying and modeling the sort of values, principles and behaviours that will be required in the search for new and socially responsible solutions to the many pressing challenges currently faced by humanity.
7. References


8. List of Contributors

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