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Universities as Corporate Entities: The Role of Social Responsibility in Their Strategic Management

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Abstract

Universities, as educational institutions, play a vital role in the development and improvement of the society, contributing to the welfare of citizens. Considering the social responsibility of universities with a large number of stakeholders (students, institutions, government, employees, companies, local community, etc.), this chapter aims to examine how these institutions establish the mission, objectives and strategic actions oriented at meeting these expectations. In this line, university in its daily management is also considered a corporate entity, which set up strategic plans and practices, an essential process to achieve its success in the long term. The chapter explores the necessary steps for adjusting these strategic plans to the new challenge of introducing a socially responsible orientation in their management.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, higher education institutions, strategic plans, university social responsibility, strategy, university strategic management, university stakeholders

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the lack of social responsible actions of the institutions and companies provokes that researchers explore the value of ethical behavior for society. In its role, university plays an essential role in the development of educational strategies, having a greater responsibility as a consequence. The term university social responsibility (USR) is explained as the capacity of higher education institutions (HEIs) to disseminate and implement a set of principles, general and specific values aimed at enhancing the educational and social challenges of the society through four key processes: management, teaching, research and extension [1].

Moreover, the role of universities is essential in the social development for the knowledge-based economy [2], assuming a strategic role in the welfare of the nations. The HEIs are considered relevant for their capacity to affect a great kind of interest groups (students, communities and society in general). Hence, USR represents an opportunity to promote the social development from the heart of the university.

However, in order to take advantages from this opportunity, it is important that academic authorities and public institutions use strategic plans which include and allow to manage and meet all of the stakeholders' requirements in the university work.

Considering this background, the chapter proposes a conceptual model which analyzes the inclusion of USR in the university management. For this study, the business scope has been taken, considering different contributions in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the way in which it has been extrapolated to the education sector. The stakeholder theory is considered as an important theory in the chapter. The stakeholders can be defined as all groups that influence or are influenced by the objectives, actions, political decisions and goals of a given organization with legitimate interests entitled to intervene [3–7].

Thus, it is assumed that decision-making affects in general a whole social system composed by different parties [8], lying in this the importance of the USR, for its high degree of impact on society. Other efforts to integrate CSR into decision-making were made by Porter and Kramer in their study "Creating Sharing Value." They stated that organizations should seek to coordinate their business with social needs and challenges, creating value not only in the company, but also in its environment [9], which demonstrates once again the effort to meet social requirements.

From a strategic point of view, USR represents an opportunity for social development, and in general in all their roles of action and in their multiple scope of impact such as organizational, educational, knowledge and social fields [10, 11]. Thus, due to the wide area of influence, in the development of USR, it is critical to formulate strategies designed to meet the needs of its various stakeholders, orienting the mission, objectives and specific actions to USR. In this chapter, it is suggested that USR actions are strategic whether they meet five specific conditions: (1) they are coordinated with the institution's mission and objectives; (2) they produce a differentiating position for the university; (3) they anticipate the needs of the stakeholders; (4) they are not been imposed by external norms and (5) when those actions are easily visible by stakeholders [12].

Moreover, a content analysis between two Spanish universities is made in order to provide evidence of the strategic inclusion of USR in university strategic plans. The content analysis reports as a main conclusion the existence of specific USR lines as well as a wide number of stakeholders identified in the development of these actions. The result is emphasized in the relevance of stakeholder theory for USR. Specifically, the model highlights the introduction of USR into strategic plan as a management tool, creating a dynamic that benefits all stakeholders.

Finally, the development of the chapter is distributed as follows. Firstly, an analysis of the transition from the CSR concept to the USR is made. In Section 3, we examine the USR inclusion in the university strategic management. In Section 4, the USR is explained based on the foundations of stakeholder theory. Section 5 presents the methods used in the content analysis. Section 6 reports the conceptual proposal. Finally, the conclusions and future research lines are discussed at the end of the chapter.

2. From corporate social responsibility to university social responsibility

The understanding of USR concept needs a review of the previous concept CSR. Therefore, it is essential to know the evolution of the CSR in order to contextualize the field of USR for HEIs.

The contributions of Howard Bowen, considered the father of the CSR [13], stated that businessmen's decision-making affects the society. With this statement, he established the basis of CSR, defining it as the obligations of businessmen to carry out desirable actions for society [14]. It can be seen that, from its beginnings, the *raison d'être* of CSR is to consider the impact of the policies, strategies and in general the organizational work.

In the 1960s, the CSR is evolving, conceiving business actions beyond economic interests in a managerial context [15]. In the educational context, in its first conceptualization, the USR concept has arisen in the university management to attract students and economic profits as a consequence. However, universities as public institutions have social obligations beyond legal and economic duties in areas like the political and educational aimed at achieving the welfare of society [16]. In this sense, compliance with the CSR is achieved by considering the needs of all stakeholders affected by the activity of the company, since institutional decision-making affects the entire social system [8].

The evolution of CSR leads to its relationship with voluntarism [17], disappearing any chance of seeing it as an attraction of economic benefits, as Davis [15] pointed out. In this context, universities have a social role and service to the community, so it is necessary to discuss the voluntary nature of the USR and its transition to compulsory. Regarding CSR definition, some works report that the compliance with the CSR is achieved meeting the social goals of citizens, as well as explain that the responsibility of the company depends on their size, having large companies more responsibility than small ones [18]. It is understandable for the university sector that responsibilities are also bigger regarding the size of the institution, since it has a greater impact on the environment and it affects the daily work in a greater number of people.

In the 1980s, the CSR concept was conceived as a process being defined as a "decision making procedure which constitute a CSR behaviour" (p. 66) [19]. Thus, as the CSR has evolved over time, it has been adapted to different types of organization, with diverse activity in different periods of time [20]. An important contribution is made by Porter and Kramer [9], establishing

that a way to rethink the relationship between society and corporate performance is through “the creation of shared value.” In this line, the authors reinforced the idea that organizations must create a greater understanding of social needs, remodeling capitalism with social relationships [9]. This goes beyond the philanthropy and specific CSR actions.

The development of the USR has been smaller than the development of CSR in private companies [21]. However, the USR studies are gaining attention and value for the necessary promotion and development of civil values and responsibilities [22]. Particularly, this attention is focused on the university capability to influence on the education of citizens in a globalized world [23], and on the university goal of building a fairer society [24]. According to these facts, social responsibility justifies its application within universities.

Unlike the CSR, the USR arises from the concern of the educational sector to contribute to social development and the impacts of HEIs. This process must be taken into account through a participatory dialogue with society in order to promote sustainable development [25]. USR should be planned as a policy of continuous improvement of the university toward the effective fulfilment of its social mission through its different management areas: (1) the organizational scope, as an entity with its own structure that consumes, has staff employed and generates waste; (2) the educational scope as an entity that is responsible for the students training; (3) the knowledge scope, as an entity that researches, producing know-how and transmitting it; and (4) the social scope as an entity which interacts with others agents, communities and social subsystems [10, 11].

Thus, the importance of the university has been increasing, since these institutions have been pressured to act in a socially responsible way due to the important educational role that they play in the society. This process has been reflected in the third mission of the university based on the transfer of knowledge to society, meeting also its social demands [26].

From a theoretical perspective, the approaches which analyze the USR are diverse. According to Gaete, we identified three main approaches [27]:

1. Managerial approach, which analyzes the impact of university work, strengthens the relations between universities and stakeholders [28, 29].
2. Transformational approach, which links the HEIs with the contribution to the debate and reflection through research and training [30].
3. Normative approach, which fosters and promotes the university values to society through national and international networks.

Furthermore, another interesting framework is developed in the corporate citizenship theory, which concerns about the duties of the company as part of society and the integrative theories that explain that the company works to satisfy the social demands of stakeholders [31]. In this case, universities as organizations operate within society and influence different stakeholders also have rights and obligations and must be managed, taking into consideration the needs of different university stakeholders.

The inclusion of USR into university strategic management is reviewed as follows.

3. The inclusion of USR in university strategic management

In order to study the USR field within HEIs, it is necessary to understand how the work of the university and the inclusion of USR in strategic management are.

First, we determine how the university strategic management performs its functions. It has been suggested that in many educational institutions strategic planning is only a short-term planning that seeks to solve specific problems and not necessarily seek the development of strategic projects [32]. Strategic planning allows HEIs to benefit from the opportunities, using resources strategically and also helping to future plans [33].

At this point, it should be wondered to know whether universities have benefited from the opportunities offered by strategic planning and whether they have taken into account their management of resources. Likewise, strategic planning also provides a sense of autonomy, facilitating decision-making process and improving the communication [34]. Moreover, several studies that support the strategic management in HEIs are becoming more numerous and diverse, mainly because of a greater demand in economic efficiency, as well as the search for a higher quality of teaching and research [35–38].

Although strategic planning is a common process implemented among HEIs, it is difficult to find a method that indicates the degree of success [39]. In addition, the literature does not identify a standardized methodology that determines the effectiveness of strategic planning or institutional learning strategies [40], and unfortunately when the strategic plan is already established, many HEIs fail to execute it [41]. Hence, the degree to which strategic planning is used is important for institutional success [42]. However, to achieve this success, the support of academic departments is necessary [43]. Also, each HEI needs different strategies due to the fact that every university has different needs and resources of each particular environment, because each institution has diverse fields of action and multiple stakeholders.

Now, we should understand how the university work is. First, we have to state their public nature, assuming responsibilities toward society [44], as well as social, environmental and economic concerns [45]. The formulation of university strategies must take into account these needs [45], including them in the mission, goals, objectives, lines of action and other components that form the strategic plan [46]. In other words, university uses a strategic management process, being particularly important the definition of the strategy, as well as its design, implementation, evaluation and control. This process is shown in **Figure 1**.

Thus, the strategic plan, as a management tool [64], helps HEIs to establish a university mission, to identify their goals and objectives and to seek actions that help achieve what is established. Such actions must be oriented toward social responsibility, due to their nature.

The place of the USR within this strategic management is reflected when the development of the mission, objectives and specific strategic actions are taking place. Academic authorities take into account and considerate the impacts of the university work to the stakeholders, as well as to evaluate and control such management. Consequently, the USR is inherent in the entire process of strategic management.

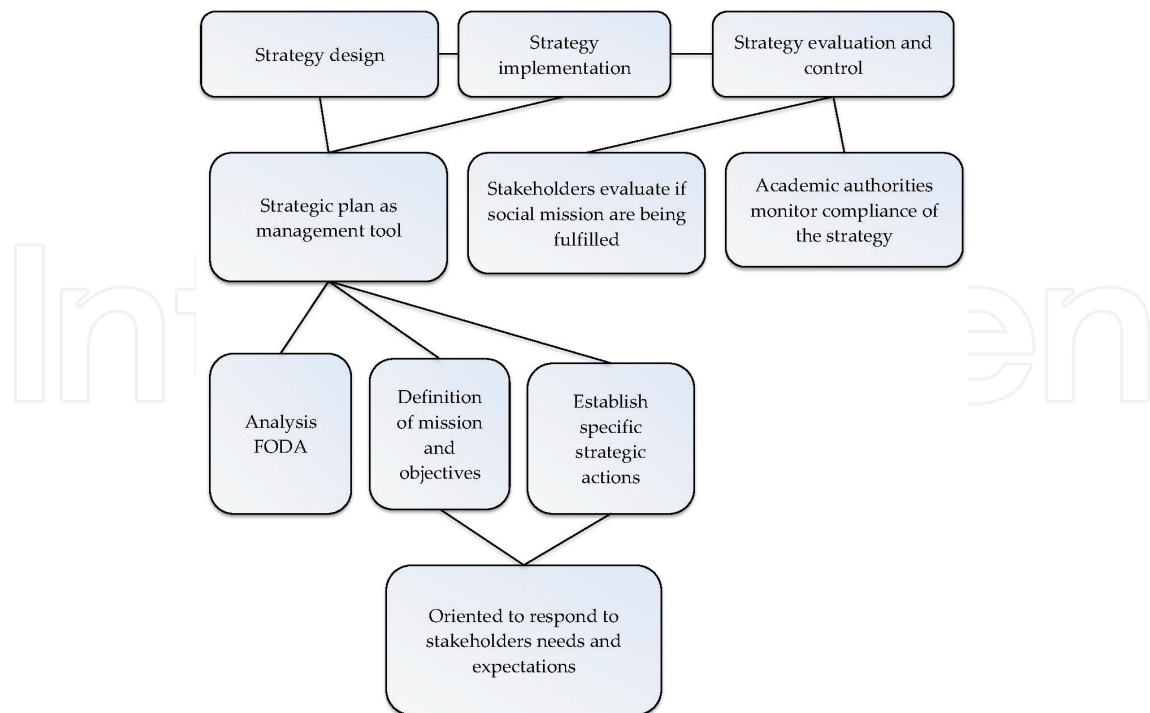


Figure 1. Social responsibility into the strategic management process based on Refs. [47, 48].

In private companies, social responsibility actions are considered strategic if they carry on a benefit to the company, are closely related to the business activities and accomplish its mission [12]. In the university case, the actions that involve the USR are also strategic when they support their social legitimacy. Burke and Logsdon [12] identified five characteristics of strategic activities oriented to social responsibility strategic actions:

1. Centrality, which refers to the proximity between CSR's activities with the mission and objectives.
2. Specificity, which is the capacity of CSR activities to benefit the organization, giving a differential position.
3. Proactivity, which provides the capacity of CSR activities to anticipate the expectations and needs of stakeholders.
4. Voluntarism, which is achieved when CSR activities have not been imposed by external standards.
5. Visibility, capacity of CSR activities to be easily located by their stakeholders.

In the same way, USR activities can be strategic or not. The analysis of the previous authors has value for this chapter, because linking the university strategy with the USR leads to the formalization of the USR into the strategic management.

4. Explanation of USR through stakeholder's theory

The reason for existence of the USR is based on the fulfilment of the needs and expectations of the stakeholders, so it is crucial to study this theory and understand who are those groups and their influence on the university work. Stakeholder theory explains that there are groups that influence or are influenced by the objectives, actions, political decisions and goals of a given organization. Also, there are groups with legitimate interests that are allowed to interfere [3–7].

According to Reavill [49] in the case of universities, the main stakeholders are as follows:

1. Students and families
2. University administrative staff and faculty
3. Suppliers of goods and services
4. Educational sector
5. Other universities
6. Commerce and industry
7. The nation
8. The government
9. Local and national taxpayers
10. Authorities and professional bodies

In order to correctly implement USR in HEIs, it is necessary to consider all university stakeholders in the management of different areas, being useful the basis of stakeholder theory to understand this phenomenon [50]. On the other hand, it is important to understand the influence of these groups on the university.

Different authors have classified this influence in different terms:

1. Theory of stakeholder salience [51], distinguishing those stakeholders according to the urgency for immediate actions, the influence or power of the stakeholders in the development of concrete actions [51, 52], and the legitimacy with the activities that they perform in the institution.
2. Some authors claim that all stakeholders are equal, and none has priority over another [3, 53, 54].
3. Others studies suggest that organizations must recognize what are the critical resources affected by these groups, making it necessary to develop different strategies for meeting these primary interests [55–57].

As a result, the previous authors conclude that some groups are more important than others due to their influence of critical resources:

1. Other classifications are based on whether these groups belong to the internal or external membership of the organization [58, 59], and finally
2. Classifies stakeholders considering their participation into an organization [60] as internal actors (participation in internal management), as stake-watchers (generate influence/pressure in the development of activities), and as stake-keepers (impose external control).

As it was mentioned before, the USR value is due to the benefits it brings to the stakeholders' community. In this perception, students and their legitimacy in university tasks deserve special attention, above all because they represent a significant consumer when obtaining the necessary training to perform professionally, benefiting from a better and responsible system of HEIs. Other stakeholders are benefited too, like academics and administrative staff by improving their training and management work. In the case of society, the achievement of graduates ready for facing the ethical challenges and values needed in the market is important, among others.

Once we have analyzed these groups, it is important to examine how HEIs can manage these relationships with their stakeholders, carrying out pro-action strategies which include social responsibility [56, 61]. The third university mission in the knowledge-based economy [2] involves reconsidering relationships with different stakeholders and then establishing working relationships with each group [59]. Based on the previous background, the strategic management and planning of USR must propose an efficient management as a result of a strategic fit between corporate strategy and social responsibility, able to meet the social and wide demands of society.

Thus, when a university seeks to be competitive, it needs to rethink whether its activities meet the needs of its stakeholders and perhaps need to build stronger strategic relationships with its stakeholders to respond to changes in the education sector [62].

5. Methods and results

Based on the fact that the university has different stakeholders, a deeper study about their environment deserves more attention. This can be understood as areas of university impact, organizational, educative, social and cognitive scope [10, 11], explained as follows:

1. Organizational scope, related to the responsibilities that HEIs have toward teaching, research, administrative and services staff; in this sense, the university has an important responsibility role of administration.
2. Educational scope, related to the responsible education of students and building the profile of graduates.

University of Cadiz (Cadiz)	Polytechnic University of Catalonia (Barcelona)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination and elaboration of a social responsibility program • The promotion and technical support to the evaluation and certification of the services and administrative units in collaboration with the general inspection of services and with the management • The elaboration of the objectives and action plans of the library and the General Directorate of Information Systems • The elaboration of the objectives, action plans and management criteria of the Publications Service of the University of Cadiz • Coordination of the Program for the Promotion of Books, Reading and Writing • Coordination of the relationships with former students • Participation in Health Promotion Programs, coordinating volunteer projects • The promotion of participation, volunteering and social commitment of the university community, cooperation with the associative fabric, as well as attention to diversity, especially in the areas of disability, culture and social disadvantage • Coordination of cooperation programs for development, immigration, culture and the promotion of human rights and social and solidarity action • The management of the Office for Sustainability • Coordination of environmental policies, sustainability and energy efficiency, with the collaboration of Management and the General Directorate of Infrastructure and Heritage • Coordination and preparation of the Annual Report of the University of Cadiz, subject to verification by an independent certification agency • Coordination of university sports, with the aim of contributing to the integral development of people • Improving student training by developing it on the principles of the Fair Play Program • The promotion and management of cultural activities that involve the participation of members of the university community • Collaboration with public and private institutions for the dissemination of culture in society with seasonal programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of the competition “Sustainability and social commitment” in the studies of degree • Creation of the STEP 2015 Program • Creation of the VISCA Teaching Innovation Group • Studies related to the dimensions of social responsibility • International Campus of Energy for Excellence • Research Groups linked to Social Responsibility • The important contribution of the community and the creation of an internal network of units, forums, debate, promotion and dissemination around the paradigm of social responsibility

Table 1. Comparison of USR practices between UCA and UPC.

3. Social scope, referred to the participation of universities into society activities to boost plenty welfare into its community.
4. Cognitive scope, related to the generation of knowledge that contributes to solve social challenges, linked with theoretical approaches, lines of research, processes of production and dissemination of knowledge.

Thus, when universities evaluate their impacts, it can be considered that university implements a cycle of continuous improvements toward the effective fulfilment of its social mission through four processes: (1) ethical and environmental management of the institution; (2) formation of responsible and supportive citizens; (3) production and dissemination of socially relevant knowledge and (4) social participation in promoting a more humane and sustainable development model [10]. Therefore, we must also emphasize that the importance of the USR comes from the commitment to society where HEIs must generate a dynamic of change toward a more fair society [63].

This chapter in order to provide evidences of the USR practices and their integration in university strategic programs made a content analysis of the web pages of the authors of the contribution. A content analysis of the University of Cadiz—UCA—and Polytechnic University of Catalonia—UPC—allows the identification of several USR practices (**Table 1**).

Source: USR practices extracted from the web pages of the universities, UCA: <http://www.uca.es/vrsocial/funciones> and UPC: <https://www.upc.edu/rsu/es/eliminar/las-acciones-que-hacemos-en-la-upc>

In both universities, we identified several cultural, environmental and educational activities related to the integration of social responsibility in university activities. Most of these activities are focusing in two of the most important stakeholder groups for the universities: the employee's staff and the students. In the specific case of the UPC, the web page classified these activities in four specific groups, aimed at satisfying and introducing socially responsible orientation in: research, teaching, organization and reflection. This classification allows us to identify what are the key strategic areas in the implementation of socially responsible practices in universities.

Most of these USR practices also meet the conditions of Burke and Logsdon [12], because they take part from the central aim of the universities, can give a differential position to them, provide the capacity to anticipate future stakeholder expectations and are voluntary and visible in the university web pages.

Despite the fact that the content analysis is limited to two universities, it represents the first step in the identification of USR activities as well as their integration into strategic programs and plans of universities. Hence, we proposed the use of USR management tool for those universities, which are interested in integrating responsible initiatives.

6. Proposal of USR management tool

In order to develop USR in a proper and formal way within HEIs, social responsibility should be introduced in the strategic planning of the university [64]. In this line, the HEIs are managed

by the university strategic management, which is composed by the technical and human team in charge of managing activities related to the university work and tasks. This process is implemented in cyclical steps through three important sections: planning, execution and evaluation at different levels (institutional, sectorial, unit and individual) [65].

Moreover, university strategic management must include in its strategic plan the mission, vision and definition of objectives and actions, ensuring an appropriate use of resources to serve to its social mission and the development of internal and external diagnostics. The conceptual proposal is presented as follows (Figure 2).

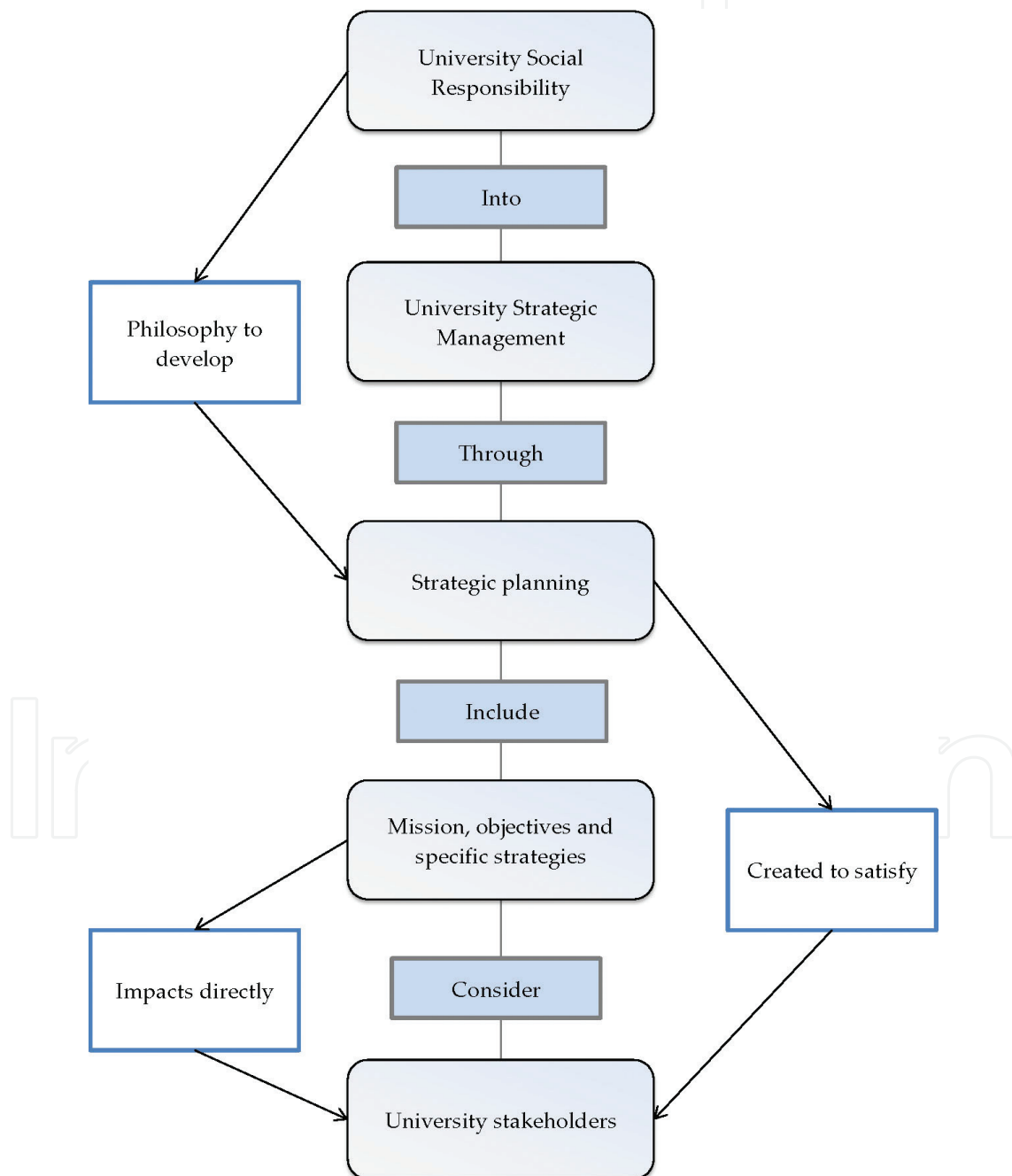


Figure 2. Role of the USR into the universities.

Therefore, it is necessary to identify how this perception could be included in the strategic plan, which includes mainly the integration of USR as philosophy of planning strategic actions (**Figure 2**). University strategic management should be oriented to evaluate the fulfilment of the needs and expectations of the stakeholders tracing the course of the university, which must be based on the USR.

Thus, university strategic management will succeed if managers are able to respond to stakeholder's needs and create welfare and if they are capable of gaining trust and generating cooperation between all university stakeholders.

7. Conclusions and future research lines

The aim of this chapter is the formal inclusion of the university social responsibility into strategic management, presenting an innovative conception of formulating strategies based on stakeholder's needs.

University potential comes from the perception of its labor on educating future professionals, but higher education institutions have much more impact beyond that. This study highlights the potential of universities through USR, by giving more attention to the academic authorities that make strategic decisions within the university.

Their strategic decisions affect multiple stakeholders into organizational, educative, social and cognitive scopes, and the importance of this issue also comes from the perception that universities are a good opportunity to generate society welfare; on the basis that university strategic management is constantly in a decision-making process. One important suggestion of this chapter is to include the university social responsibility as an inherent part of this decision-making, considering every impact that university could cause from its strategic decision.

Several contributions from corporate responsibility have been taken to explain the implementation of social responsibility into universities, such as "the creation of shared value" [9], where companies look forward the integration of social needs into daily work, creating value for organizations and for society.

Also as special contribution of this chapter we based on strategic management process: design, implementation, evaluation and control [47, 48]. In this process, it is proposed to establish an orientation of the mission, objectives and specific strategic aimed at achieving university goals and evaluate if the social mission of university is fulfilled.

In the same line, USR in the content analysis we made meets the conditions of Burke and Logsdon [12]: centrality, specificity, proactivity, voluntarism and visibility, suggesting that there is not too much difference between the CSR implementation and USR implementation in the practice. The work of Burke and Logsdon plays a relevant role in the identification of strategic USR practices. Moreover, the content analysis shed light on the identification of four strategic sections for implementing socially responsible actions: teaching, researching organization and reflection concerns.

Thus, the only way for USR to increase the university values is to be integrated into the strategic management of universities as a formal process. The university decision makers must establish a mission, objectives and specific strategic actions to respond to stakeholder's needs and expectations and coordinate all process by using the strategic plan as management tool. Once they create this plan, they should execute it and evaluate if university work truly accomplishes the stakeholder requirements. Consequently, university social responsibility should be placed as a philosophy to develop the strategic plan, and authorities should implement strategies anticipating stakeholder's expectation.

Therefore, the complexity of this issue deserves more analysis in its different aspects, such as current demands of university stakeholders and how universities meet the expectations; what is the situation of USR into the university strategic management in other Spanish and European universities; and knowing from university decision makers whether they are really interested in implementing USR initiatives and monitoring these activities. These issues have to be considered by all people interested in university performance and development in future research lines.

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