

A holistic overview on the implementation of socially responsible practices in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

This paper aims to present a holistic overview of the integration of multiple socially responsible practices in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In fact, this topic has nowadays become crucial for universities and other higher education and scientific research institutions to guarantee the satisfaction of the multiple internal and external stakeholders (students, professors, administrative staff, external partners...) and to insure an optimal quality performance of those institutions. For this purpose, we first presented to the university in its changing context; our aim was to show up and to identify the main steps and milestones that characterized the higher education sector. Then, we tackled some several aspects of the University Social Responsibility concept (USR), starting from its roots and relationship with the CSR concept (Corporate Social responsibility), arriving to its diverse definitions. After, we discussed the importance of the university governance system and the stakeholders within the integration of socially responsible practices in HEIs. Moreover, we chose PRME “Principles of Responsible Management Education”, which is a UN (United Nations) initiative, as an example of integrating socially responsible practices in business schools and an inspiration for HEIs in all specialties to proceed in the same way. Finally, we suggested a theoretical model based on the analysis of the different discussed points in this paper.

The theoretical model resulting from the analysis made in this article can serve as a basis for future empirical research, with the aim of identifying the main dimensions that act and strongly impact on the integration of socially responsible practices within higher education institutions, in particular through the implementation of a USR approach.

Keywords: Socially Responsible Practices, University Social Responsibility, Higher Education Institutions, University Governance, Stakeholders.

JEL Classification: M14, I23.

Paper type: Theoretical Research

1. Introduction

Universities play a leading role in the training and formation of leaders. They act as a social actor through the extension of the accessibility of knowledge and the promotion of education following the reality of society (Domínguez Pachón & López Canseco, 2009). They have an important place in the construction of the future (Latif, 2017), but also in the construction of a responsible society anchored in ethical values. Today, universities cannot function in autarchy, so they have to open up fully to their social environments and different stakeholders (Thöni and Schneller 2011).

Indeed, the mission of higher education institutions (HEIs) is not only to train the skills of tomorrow but also to produce responsible citizens with good reasoning skills (Barbot & Juban, 2018).

In recent years, the teaching and education sector has been strongly impacted by various political, economic, and technological changes (Vasilescu et al., 2010). In the context of globalization, higher education institutions seek to adapt their performance to the needs of society (Vázquez et al., 2014). In addition, HEIs aim to capitalize on their potentials and thus review their governance and organizational structures to face the different challenges imposed by globalization, the development of scientific and technological research, innovation, and sustainable development.

Currently, universities are in the process of making various adjustments to cope with the different difficulties and challenges that arise (Burchell et al., 2015). Universities are no longer solely concerned with education and training activities but remain a major player in the design of the future in the service of the nation and the world (Sullivan 2003).

To date, higher education institutions have managed to fulfill their responsibilities in terms of educating young people and developing scientific research (Martí-Noguera, et al. (2017). However, given the different challenges imposed by the current situation, these institutions are invited to widen their thresholds of responsibility at the societal level, through the adoption and deployment of socially responsible practices.

Through the exchange with society in general and social partners in particular, the university embodies aspects that have an impact on their social projections as well as their parameters of influence (Giuffré & Ratto, 2014). Thus, students and their parents perceive higher education institutions as the main place where young people receive a quality education and spend several years of intellectual development, thus allowing them to open up to several professional horizons. While companies see universities as a hub for training talented profiles that can serve as future employees (Latif, 2017) academic and administrative staff perceive higher education institutions as centers of expertise with the capacity to solve and deal with the most complex problems (Bok, 1982).

At present, one of the major challenges of higher education institutions is to train a future generation of citizens who are aware of their responsibilities and the issues related to these challenges (Baakil et al., 2017). For this reason, the aim of our research consists of browsing the literature and observing how the integration of socially responsible practices may help HEIs to face the multiple problems and challenges cited below.

By bringing together the various aspects around the concept of USR and the integration of socially responsible practices within higher education institutions, this paper aims to provide all stakeholders in the higher education sector in general and decision-makers in particular with a clear vision of how USR can contribute to the promotion of the sector as a vital force and a

major factor in the development of any country. For this purpose, the present article treats, firstly, the becoming of the higher education sector in a changing context in order to bring out the different mutations that have occurred along its evolution. Secondly, it presents an overview of the USR concept, in order to provide its definitions and draw out its relationship with the CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) concept. Thirdly, this article tackles the role of the university governance in the implementation of socially responsible practices, notably through its several stockholders. Fourthly, the paper shows up the incorporation of socially responsible practices into business schools via the PRME (Principles of Responsible Management education) initiative launched by the United-Nations. Finally, this article suggests a theoretical model as a result of the analysis of the previous discussed aspects.

Therefore, we mainly have borrowed the concepts of university governance, integration of socially responsible practices, and stakeholder theory. We have drawn details of these from prestigious international journals, from various scientific databases (e.g. Scopus, Web Of Science, Cairn, Springer, Jstor, etc.).

2. Higher Education in a Changing Context

The world nowadays is facing a multitude of economic, political, and social changes, which have affected the field of higher education through several undertaken reforms (Abdelilah, 2019). This being said, universities are ready to initiate important reforms to cope with these changes (Vasilescu et al., 2010).

According to research by Barblan et al., 2007, these profound changes in the higher education environment are characterized by a massive expansion of higher education, strong commercialization, internationalization, and the introduction of ICTs (New Information and Communication Technologies), in return for low funding of this sector.

The process of development of higher education institutions has been accentuated by the different socio-cultural changes linked to the knowledge society (Zubillaga del Río & Sánchez Hípola, 2005). According to Jorge and Pena (2017), the different changes related to the higher education sector affects three main elements, namely: the will of the institution, public governance reforms, and the inter-university relationship in the context of a knowledge economy.

Gibbons, (2005) also consider that higher education institutions are impacted by the new context of changes related to globalization, innovation, and the knowledge economy. He, therefore, sees this as a real advantage as this environment promotes greater competitiveness between universities.

Meanwhile, Felt (2005) has distinguished the factors of change in the higher education system into two main components, namely external and internal factors. The first ones include the depreciation of state investment in higher education, the economic rationalization of academic institutions, and the inclusion and integration of certain external stakeholders in matters considered 'internal' within universities. While the second ones relate to the various divergences between the training and scientific research structures.

3. Overview of the Concept of University Social Responsibility

According to Dahan & Senol, 2012, given the overlap between academic activities and societal trends, higher education institutions are called upon to strengthen themselves in terms of socially responsible practices. In addition, according to the same authors, socially responsible practices in academia will not only support the welfare of society in general and stakeholders

in particular but will be an asset and a long-term added value in the internal management of these higher education institutions.

In this sense, and to refine our research, we will explore the notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Then, we will deepen our analysis by focusing on the various facets of University Social Responsibility (USR).

3.1. The Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility

According to Hirst & Hopkins (1998), CSR is considered as a set of activities that ensure respect for the principles of ethics and equality concerning stakeholders. Clyde (1999) perceives CSR as a memorandum of understanding between the company and society, in the sense that community stakeholders grant exercise and operating rights to the company, in return for which the latter undertakes to act responsibly. Hill et al., (2007) considers CSR to be a set of moral, legal, and economic actions by companies that have an impact on stakeholders. It is about treating stakeholders ethically and responsibly (Hirst & Hopkins, 1998).

CSR has a key role to play in actively contributing to sustainable development, defined by the United Nations (UN) as economic, social, and environmental development that meets current needs without undermining future generations. According to Marsden (2001), a "socially responsible" organization takes into account all environmental and socio-economic concerns, so CSR cannot be considered as philanthropy or a set of complimentary activities.

For Renault (2008), it is a matter of considering the organization as a multi-tasking unit, presenting a real added value for the benefit of its partners through a purely "partnership" approach. It is also seen as a solution for resolving conflicts between the management bodies and the various stakeholders (Jensen, 2001, Calton and Payne, 2003, Scherer et al., 2006). This concept also describes how companies manage their various business processes by ensuring a positive impact on their environments and stakeholders, through a logic that goes beyond existing regulatory thresholds (Jo & Harjoto, 2011). CSR has dual functionality; namely, maximizing financial gains for shareholders and compliance with societal rules (Friedman, 1970). That said, there is a strong influence of CSR on improving the performance of organizations (Petrenko et al.2016; Reverte et al.2016; Loosemore and Lim 2017).

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development defines CSR as a commitment by companies to ensure economic development by prioritizing the quality of life of employees, their surroundings, and society in general (WBCSD, 2000: 8). In fact, according to McWilliams and Siegel (2001), CSR goes beyond profit-making objectives, promoting social fulfillment and well-being, also going beyond the direct sphere of intervention (Attarça & Jacquot, 2005). It has an important role in promoting the social good, thus exceeding the regulatory thresholds required by legislation (McWilliams and Siegel, 2001).

According to Matten & Moon, (2008), CSR cannot simply be defined technically, but also requires the integration of the ideological dimension. The notion of "social contract", a major element of CSR, was introduced by Bowen (1953) and continued by (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). This notion forms a bridge between the company and its stakeholders. Three key elements characterize this contract and constitute the Reverte so-called "Triple Bottom Line", namely the economic, social, and societal components (Elkington, 1998). To this end, companies must interact with their sphere of stakeholders by emphasizing the moral and ethical dimensions, with a view to sustainability.

Social responsibility is far from being a requirement; it is a set of voluntary actions mobilizing decision-making bodies through ethical and transparent behavior, in favor of

sustainable development and the interests of stakeholders, per existing laws and international standards as an example the ISO 26000 standard (Chen et al., 2015). Indeed, the ISO 26000 standard lists seven main fields in which it operates, namely:

- Organizational governance;
- Human rights;
- Workplace practices;
- The environment;
- Fair operating practices;
- Consumer issues;
- Community and stakeholder development and involvement.

Carroll (1999) made a distinction between economic and non-economic items within the firm. According to him, the economic items concern the profit-making aspect that the company produces for itself, while the non-economic items are those intended for other stakeholders. In addition, Carroll (1991) has ruled four essential levels of CSR:

The first level is the economic responsibility, where the organization is made to be an engine for generating financial gains. While the second level concerns legal responsibility, by ensuring compliance with the regulations in force. Nevertheless, the third level is about social responsibility, where the organization deploys a civic approach based on benevolence towards society. The fourth level is the ethical responsibility, which is linked to the satisfaction of the various needs expected by stakeholders and society.

In sum, given its multi-sectoral dimension, the term-Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is often replaced by Organizational Social Responsibility (OSR) (Vallaey, 2013).

3.2. The emergence of the USR concept

The literature on CSR is quite extensive, thanks in part to the multitude of research studies that have been undertaken in recent years on the subject. However, social responsibility applied to higher education institutions, or commonly referred to as USR, is a new concept that has been little studied to date. Similar to the notion of CSR, USR is described as universities taking into consideration the full range of stakeholder concerns (Rolland & de La Debutrie, 2018).

CSR is not only about businesses seeking economic gain; it is also about nonprofit organizations and especially higher education institutions (Bokhari, 2017).

Given the position of the university of society, the definition of USR can be inspired by the conceptualization of CSR (Bokhari, 2017). Universities share the same challenges and difficulties as private companies and public organizations in terms of management; as a result, USR has its origins in CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) (Barbot & Juban, 2018). To this end, the university is required, by its main missions of education and scientific research, to adopt ethical behavior, particularly via transparency, equity, and accountability to stakeholders.

Being a continuation of the notion of CSR, USR does not have a historical evolution as such. For this, Luangsay-Catelin & Gasner-Bouquet (2018) qualified USR as an "elastic" notion resulting in the integration of social, economic, environmental, and cultural issues in the main activities of universities and their relations with different partners and local actors. For these same authors, the USR considers that universities are not only limited to the teaching function, but they also participate in scientific research, innovation, and service to society.

The Talloires Declaration held in 1990 revealed the emergence of the concept of Social Responsibility of Universities (USR). In this declaration, 22 legal representatives of higher education institutions from 52 countries affirmed that these institutions will be pioneers in terms

of supporting, creating, developing, and maintaining sustainability (Luangsay-Catelin & Gasner-Bouquet, 2018). The Tailloires declaration was followed by the Bologna declaration in 1999 as well as the University Social Responsibility in Europe project held in 2013. As a result, the European Commission has aimed through these events to promote USR within higher education institutions (HEIs).

The non-existence of unanimity about the delimitation of the concept of USR leads to prospecting about the existence of a conceptualization of this theme in the literature and calls for the initiation of research on this topic (Esfijani et al., 2013, Larran Jorge and Andrades Pena, 2017).

3.3. USR concept definitions

Like various institutional actors, higher education institutions have become fully aware of the issues involved in adopting socially responsible practices vis-à-vis their environments (Luangsay-Catelin & Gasner-Bouquet, 2018).

University social responsibility consists of incorporating economic, social, societal, and environmental issues into the daily operations of higher education institutions internally, as well as externally to the ecosystem around them (Luangsay-Catelin & Gasner-Bouquet, 2018). Through this process, these institutions adopt a "corporate" attitude perfectly similar to those of businesses (Dewatripont et al. 2001).

In reviewing the literature, we found a variety of perceptions in the definitions of USR. To unify the meaning of these different definitions, Esfijani et al., (2013) first proceeded to detect the recurrent keywords in the definitions, namely: ethics, stakeholders, training, research, engagement, knowledge. The authors then ruled to define USR as the integration by higher education institutions of all functions in coherence with the needs of stakeholders, mobilizing the values of transparency, ethics, and commitment. In this same sense, Shek et al., (2017) conceive USR as a way of contributing to the promotion of society by integrating social responsibility into the management mode of training, research, and public relations activities.

Reiser (2008) perceives USR as a policy that integrates the dimensions of quality and ethics into the core of the performance of higher education institutions and their users (students, administrative and academic staff), especially through the establishment of a channel of communication with society, with the aim of integration of societal issues and sustainability of the human factor development.

According to Chen et al., (2015), USR plays a key role in social change in that this responsibility requires a university policy based on quality, performance, and ethics within governance. These same authors also see USR as a philosophy of the university in deploying ethics-based practices with local and global communities to support economic, environmental, social, and technical sustainability.

Vasilescu et al., (2010) discuss USR as a trend toward civic engagement and active citizenship behaviors; such as encouraging users (students, academic and administrative staff) to undertake volunteer and social service actions with local actors, to promote social, economic, and ecological sustainability. Indeed, the USR's major missions are to contribute to the improvement of economic, ecological, and social aspects in a logic of contribution to sustainable development (Sánchez & Zaldivar, 2016).

Giuffré & Ratto (2014) define USR as the potential of the higher education institution to promote a panoply of global values and principles, based on 4 main components, namely: governance, training, scientific research, and dissemination, and this through teaching services,

ethical transfer of knowledge and technologies, good governance practices as well as ensuring social and environmental development.

Through the adoption of socially responsible practices, USR is considered the main channel for the generalization of said practices within the different components of society (Luangsay-Catelin & Gasner-Bouquet, 2018). The importance of the concept of Social Responsibility of the University has also been deployed through the genesis of several organizations dedicated to the treatment of this theme, following the example of the alliance of social responsibility of the university, created in 2008 in San Francisco - USA (Vasilescu et al., 2010).

It appears that the notion of social responsibility has not yet been sufficiently explored in the sector of higher education (Luangsay-Catelin & Gasner-Bouquet, 2018). However, theoretical definitions are drawn from the literature (Reiser, 2007; Larran and Andrades, 2013; Garde et al., 2013) incessantly link USR to the stakeholder theory of Freeman (1984) (Abdelilah, 2019).

To meet the expectations and needs of different stakeholders, USR leads universities to incorporate social, environmental, and ethical values into the core of their different activities (Larran Jorge and Andrades Pena, 2017).

According to Ali et al, (2020), the concept of USR revolves around four basic aspects namely:

- Awareness of the social problem
- The source of information about the social problem
- The training to be carried out
- The cooperation with the interested parties.

This, therefore, allows for the classification of higher education institutions according to their abilities to operate in a socially responsible manner (Hopson et al., 2016).

3.3.1. Purposes of the USR

According to a study conducted by Rolland and Majou de La Debutrie (2018), it is impossible to address the concept of USR without defining its purposes. To do so, the authors ruled for the following purposes:

The first purpose concerns having a well-specified basis of attachment. In fact, it is highly observed that USR significantly lacks the so-called "for-profit" foundation compared to CSR, given that (public) higher education institutions do not have a purely commercial purpose aimed at maximizing customer attraction (Rolland and Majou de La Debutrie, 2018). However, it is relevant for these institutions to use the foundations of the CSR approach to increase their attractiveness, but also to retain academic and administrative staff, especially in a context marked by strong competitiveness (Granjet, 2012). It should also be noted that the CSR approach could be implicit or explicit on the part of universities.

The second purpose is about being at the service of people in general, students, and stakeholders. No progress in the USR approach can be achieved without putting people at the heart of the priority concerns. This being said, the human being remains the key element of this approach, its importance largely exceeds that of the elements related to energy consumption or economic interest.

According to Vallaeys (2013), USR is shaped by the introduction of ethical quality within the community of higher education institutions and mainly users (students, teacher-researchers, administrative staff), via responsible conduct of educational, social, ecological, and cognitive impacts emanating from universities, in a democratic and participatory approach with the different actors of society to improve human development in a sustainable dimension via four (4) main steps, namely: commitment, self-evaluation, compliance, accountability.

3.3.2. Coherence of the USR approach

It is necessary to find homogeneity and coherence in the USR approach within the Rolland and Majou de La Debutrie (2018) higher education institutions. This coherence is essentially translated by the accomplishment of two steps, namely the structuring and the sustainability of the USR approach.

The first step is related to the structuring the USR approach, there are multiple forms of action in terms of USR (Danis-Fatome, 2014; Ory et al., 2018b). However, it is quite notable that higher education institutions have several similarities in their methods of operation (Ory et al., 2018b). Among the most answered practices, universities tend, for example, to organize info days for sustainable development awareness, solidarity actions, etc. Because of this, it proves to be essential to establish homogeneity in the sense that USR is completely integrated into the strategy of these institutions instead of being an agenda of different actions. In this sense, it is essential to establish processes with their regulations, procedures, and monitoring systems.

However, the second step concerns the sustainability of the USR process. The time dimension is considered to be an important element of the USR process. Its duration is indeed an essential element of the success of the approach. This temporal dimension is also linked to the stability of the governance bodies of the higher education institutions, this being said, instability of the top management would generate a loss of existing knowledge; hence the need to implement an efficient Knowledge Management system. The USR approach should also be part of the institution's ideology so that it acquires immunity to changes in management bodies.

4. University Governance, Socially Responsible Practices, and Stakeholders

USR can be achieved through the integration of responsible management in the governance of higher education institutions. This integration is also accompanied by an interactive exchange with the various actors of society, to achieve sustainable development in the fields of education and scientific research (Chen et al., 2015). Indeed, this exchange based on ethical values should not only be limited to actors from the academic community but also stakeholders related to the business community (Esfijani & Chang, 2012a, 2012b; Reiser, 2007; Vallaey, 2013). In this sense, we will first address the issue of governance and its relationship with the concept of USR, then we will discuss the insertion of socially responsible practices within higher education institutions and finally, we will present the different points related to the interactions of the different stakeholders with these institutions.

4.1. USR Governance and Strategy in the Higher Education Environment

In management science, there is a great deal of research that seeks to find the links between the social responsibility concept and the processes of governance and management (Gond et al., 2012).

Felt (2003) considers that there is an intersection between higher education systems around the world despite the political, economic, social, technological, and legal differences that characterize the different countries. According to this same author, these common points lie in the gradual disengagement of the States in the subsidization of scientific research, and the opening of universities in an autonomous way on new diversified modes of financing and an entrepreneurial spirit, but also the adoption of a new form of responsibility via a greater margin of "academic freedom".

In addition, the structuring and governance systems of higher education institutions are facing several changes resulting in a distribution of decision-making powers and responsibilities, but also the intervention of different internal and external stakeholders based on the principle of accountability (José Javier Buenaño Cabrera et al., 2018). Indeed, the great importance of the connection between stakeholders and control bodies within higher education institutions is markedly noticeable (Ceacero and Folch, 2016).

According to Del Rosario Maldonado Mera and Benavides (2018), governance within higher education institutions needs some amendments. In this sense, university management and governance must be inscribed in a social responsibility perspective correlated with the principle of transparency (Núñez, Alonso, and Pontones 2015).

The USR has a global dimension in the sense that it is based on the effective engagement of all internal stakeholders of higher education institutions, being perfectly embedded in the governance policy of these institutions (Barbot & Juban, 2018).

The world of higher education has an important capacity to act as a driver of social reform converging towards sustainability (Stephens et al., 2008). As a result, universities have increasingly begun to emulate the "corporate" attitude of private companies, however, the mode of governance and management must also adapt in the same way (Dahan & Senol, 2012). In addition, the governance system of higher education institutions must fluctuate from a Weberian hierarchical and bureaucratic arrangement to governance centered on the expectations of the different stakeholders (Cômes & Rouet, 2017).

Social responsibility requires a mode of governance that promotes sustainable development and eliminates bad practices and non-compliance to converge towards a so-called "sustainable" society. Moreover, the integration of USR into the governance systems of higher education institutions is not only a means of implementing societal and environmental actions in favor of sustainable development, but it is also a means of structuring and controlling the University's internal processes, aiming to strengthen and intensify the impact of its outputs (training, scientific research, innovation, etc.).

Balabanis et al., (1998) consider that organizations must adopt a moral behavior that converges with guidelines dictated by society. In addition, Ebner and Baumgartner (2006) consider that CSR requires a mode of governance that allows decisions to go in the same line along with the values and objectives of the society. That said, indeed, to promote socially responsible values, higher education institutions have an interest in adopting socially responsible governance.

Relying on ethical values and socially responsible practices, higher education institutions are encouraged to provide their training, research, and knowledge transfer services by disseminating good practices in governance, social engagement, civic responsibility, and respect for the environment (Garde et al., 2013, p. 710).

According to Perić & Delić (2016), through socially responsible governance, universities can find solutions to various social problems, including promoting social entrepreneurship, evolving educational programs, and creating a climate that fosters cooperation between different business sectors to address societal challenges. According to Shawyun (2011), USR is also a hub for universities to improve their quality management and accreditation programs. As a result, to sustain the human dimension within the university, the latter is led to integrating interdisciplinary modules into training programs (Caillé and Vatin 2009). Indeed, curricula must contain soft skills and citizenship education programs to accompany the core specialty subjects.

Through the integration of USR in their strategies, higher education institutions promote the strengthening of their competitiveness and foster organizational innovation (Luangsay-Catelin & Gasner-Bouquet, 2018); an essential element in university governance.

Also, in its strategy and mode of governance, the higher education institution must include social responsibility in the center of its concerns, to meet the expectations of different internal and external stakeholders, namely students, administrative and faculty bodies, laureates and their employers, funders, industry, etc.) (Chen et al., 2015). Furthermore, in an environment marked by high competitiveness, universities need to enhance their attractiveness to students through the integration of socially responsible practices into governance strategies (Jimena 2011). The implementation of Social Responsibility strategies within higher education institutions is a key element allowing them to promote their reputations and make gains in terms of competitiveness and attractiveness (Dahan & Senol, 2012).

4.2. Integrating Socially Responsible Practices Into the Higher Education Environment

In the present time, the concept of social responsibility has crucial importance and is debated worldwide because of its impact in terms of competitiveness and sustainability (Vasilescu, et al., 2010). Indeed, socially responsible practices result in the establishment of a very favorable environment for the operation of the economic activities of organizations (Attarça & Jacquot, 2005). Several names for social responsibility are contained in the literature, such as organizational citizenship, social performance, organizational sustainability, or ethical leadership (Aras & Crowther, 2008).

The values of social responsibility have always been an integral part of the various missions of universities. Indeed, universities integrate these values into their managerial strategies, allowing them to move beyond the educational component to other components of organizational management (Dahan & Senol, 2012).

The juncture of the beginning of the current century has led higher education institutions to review and reassess their missions within the social sphere (Ali, Osman, Hassan, 2020). According to these authors, universities are aware of environmental issues and have taken the necessary steps to align themselves with the SDGs and socially responsible values. Hence, higher education institutions are seen as a key influencer of socially responsible practices and sustainability, not only with students but also with the sphere of communities with which they operate (Söderbaum, 2009).

In the higher education sector, the majority of research have focused on the sustainability dimension (Wals & Blewitt, 2010; Karatzoglou, 2013). This is said, higher education institutions are required not only to promote sustainable development practices in the different fields of intervention but also to integrate the components of ethical values and social responsibility in the training programs (Chen et al., 2015).

The adoption of socially responsible practices within higher education institutions lies in the business of training and knowledge transfer together with the values of citizenship, ethics, good governance, and accountability (De la Cuesta et al., 2011). It also consists of "voluntarily" integrating ethical and social issues into the main activities of higher education institutions (training, research, etc.), while meeting the needs of stakeholders (Larran and Andrades, 2017).

According to Abdelilah (2019), higher education institutions are qualified as socially responsible when they adopt values of ethics and transparency and when they integrate social, societal, and environmental issues in their training curricula. According to the same author,

socially responsible universities are those that deploy quality assurance in their activities and mainly knowledge transfer and research, they adopt good governance in their management processes, taking into account the promotion of civic values, citizenship, and ethics, prioritizing stakeholders, in the hope to promote the socio-economic and environmental development of the areas of the impact.

Higher education institutions have a strong commitment to society through their missions (Howard and Sharma, 2006). Moreover, they fulfill a moral obligation through intervention on ethical, social, economic, and ecological issues in society, which is considered one of the priorities of said institutions (Bokhari, 2017). As a result, social responsibility has become the core business of universities, education, and research (Shek et al., 2017).

Given the major importance of social responsibility, Vallaeys (2013) outlined the main points that higher education institutions should be aware of, namely: social responsibility is about the impact of the organizations' behavior on society, it must operate following existing laws and it requires synergy and coordination between the different stakeholders involved in the impact of the detected non-compliance.

Nowadays, the depreciation and disrespect of the basic values of society are highly noticeable. To this end, higher education institutions are increasingly required to integrate modules related to "ethics and citizenship education" in the training programs of students (Baakil et al., 2017). In the United States, for example, a large number of universities have established specific USR programs in their training modules. They also offer support in several activities under social responsibility and sustainable development, such as energy efficiency, efficient water management, ecological recycling, etc. (Ali, Osman, Hassan, 2020).

Special interest should be given to educational and pedagogical approaches and the human factor to ensure an effective transfer of citizenship principles and ethical values (Baakil et al., 2017). According to these authors, university citizenship is strongly linked to the sense of belonging to the institution.

In the same logic of social responsibility, Giuffré & Ratto (2014) assert that higher education institutions should ensure some implementation and innovation in ICT (Information and Communication Technology) to solve sustainability issues around the world allowing students to equip themselves with the appropriate skills and ethical values.

Universities are also led to defining their USR strategies in the logic of continuous improvement on all levels, namely: a socially responsible campus, knowledge management, and social knowledge, as well as participation in civic training (Vallaeys, 2008).

According to Reiser (2007), the "sustainable" campus or university is a concept that can be used as a strategy to optimize energy consumption and the environmental footprint, through rational consumption of resources, and also a means to raise awareness among users (students and academic and administrative staff) to adopt a responsible and sustainable behavior. This being said, the author classifies the socially responsible practices of higher education institutions as follows:

- The initiation of students to adopt responsible and civic behaviors to achieve sustainable development.
- Integrating social responsibility into the scientific research process.
- The exchange of acquired knowledge ensures development.
- A sustainable and socially responsible university environment.

Furthermore, in the same research work, Reiser (2007) identified 6 main evaluative axes of USR policy in higher education institutions, namely:

- The official discourse of the institution (vision, strategy, etc.).
- The values adopted through the institution's promotional campaigns.
- The training programs (modules and activities).
- The relationship with society (social aspect, university-business relationship, technology transfer, etc.).
- Ethical value environment.
- Energy efficiency.

The concept of USR tends to adapt the main purposes of higher education institutions according to the particularities of their environments (Herrera, 2009).

4.3. Interactions with stakeholders in the higher education community

To date, universities cannot operate in autarky but must be fully open to their social environments and different stakeholders (Thöni and Schneller 2011). Most scientific research links USR to Freeman's stakeholder theory (1984).

Stakeholders play a key role in understanding the different aspects of social responsibility (Turker, 2009). They are indeed crucial in identifying the dimensions of social responsibility (Latif, 2017) and have direct or indirect interests in the company (Verdeyen et al., 2004). According to Freeman (1984), they can be classified as primary and secondary. Charkham (1994), for his part, classified them as public and contracting. For Clarkson (1994), they can be voluntary and involuntary. Wheeler and Sillanpaa (1997) base their classification on the sociability factor and consider that stakeholders can be primarily social, secondary social, primary non-social, and secondary non-social. Finally, the classification most present in the literature was proposed by Verdeyen et al., (2004), where they distinguished between internal and external stakeholders.

Les différentes interactions avec les parties prenantes sont une priorité de la société civile (Fryzel 2011). Ainsi, les établissements d'enseignement supérieur sont empêtrés dans une ribambelle de parties prenantes, formant un environnement plutôt complexe et diversifié (Latif, 2017). À ce titre, une communication efficace et efficiente avec les parties prenantes permettrait d'aborder les questions d'intérêt public (Visser, 2014), prévenant ainsi les risques de retombées sociétales négatives.

Grâce à leur ouverture sur le monde extérieur, les établissements d'enseignement supérieur adoptent de plus en plus une identité entrepreneuriale (Clark, 1998, 2001) qui place différentes parties prenantes en son centre (Ory, 2018). Ces parties prenantes peuvent être internes (étudiants, personnel académique, personnel technique et administratif), mais aussi externes (gouvernement, autorités locales, industrie, partenaires nationaux et internationaux, etc.) L'approche par les parties prenantes permet, dans le cadre du management stratégique, de développer un nouveau modèle de mesure et de suivi de la performance des établissements d'enseignement supérieur à une échelle multidimensionnelle (Ory, 2018).

The integration of social responsibility practices in higher education institutions is proving to be a rather tricky task (Latif 2017). Faced with a wide range of stakeholders, this is proving to be a real challenge (Garde Sánchez et al. 2013). All decisions made within higher education institutions must be rooted in ethical values and demonstrate credibility to external partners and stakeholders. However, it is essential to systematically assess the socio-economic and environmental components of social responsibility (Cross 1998).

In the case of universities, faculty, students, and their parents are considered among the stakeholders most influenced by social responsibility activities. Organizations, through top management, aim to address the needs of internal and external stakeholders fairly (Edward Freeman & Evan, 1990). In addition, collecting the opinions and views of stakeholders would be an incomparable way to evaluate the performance of corporate social activities (Turker 2009).

According to López Noriega et al., (2015), higher education institutions are required to equip themselves with socially responsible practices that go beyond the required regulatory thresholds, as well as to deploy synergies with different internal and external stakeholders. In this sense, higher education institutions need to integrate social responsibility as an explicit variable in their strategies in the medium and long-term perspectives, to act as major actors in the changes desired by society (Quezada, 2016).

In higher education institutions, the concern is that the USR deals mostly with topics related to the quality of student life. However, this concept has to deal with a multitude of stakeholders; namely academic and administrative staff, supervisory ministries, providers and suppliers, the trade union world, etc. Indeed, the USR must have as its purpose the treatment of employability issues, the performance and competitiveness of the university, the diversification of the training offer, and the promotion of skills (Luangsay-Catelin & Gasner-Bouquet, 2018). In addition, in the context of their interactions with stakeholders, socially responsible universities must establish an efficient system of knowledge and knowledge transfer towards industries and the business world. The USR must also respond to and invite universities to respond to problems of various natures, including social and societal, through scientific research actions.

Users within higher education institutions (students, academic and administrative staff) are involved in a participatory learning approach, based on taking into account suggestions and feedback from external stakeholders (Ali, Osman, Hassan, 2020). This approach indeed promotes research through continuous interactions between internal and external stakeholders (Chile & Black, 2015). In addition, social responsibility research has proven the existence of a "win-win" relationship between user satisfaction and positive feedback (Green and Pelozo 2011).

Socially responsible practices send important positive messages to stakeholders (Galbreath 2010), in effect increasing the credibility and reputation of universities. To ensure the satisfaction of different stakeholders, continuous progress and stability must reign within the management bodies of higher education institutions (Sánchez-Hernández & Mainardes, 2016).

Thus, employees are in turn strongly influenced by socially responsible behaviors emanating from their managers; this engages the satisfaction of their psychological needs (Rupp et al., 2006).

Socially responsible practices also allow institutions of higher education to ensure the protection of freedom of expression, an essential element for researchers in their search for new knowledge and understanding (Bok, 1982).

5. PRME: an example of the incorporation of socially responsible practices in HEIs

Higher education institutions nowadays are undergoing various and diverse changes leading to the culmination of an innovative approach in the management of the higher education sector (Vázquez et al., 2014).

In this regard, international institutions play a great role in promoting socially responsible practices in universities (Abdelilah, 2019). Several international organizations such as the UN,

OECD, and UNESCO place the responsibility of higher education institutions in a dimension of sustainable development and social responsibility, which have become embodied components in their activities (Annoot, 2012, Vasilescu et al., 2010). Intending to embody socially responsible principles and practices within higher education institutions, the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development proposed in 2007 the initiative entitled Principles for Responsible Management Education "PRME", aimed primarily at business schools and with the output of creating sustainable and responsible companies.

PRME (Principles for Responsible Management Education) is an international initiative that aims to revolutionize education in general and business schools in particular, but also to enhance research, education, and good leadership through responsible management (PRME, Beddewela, et al., 2017). This initiative is indeed the first of its kind targeting higher education institutions operating in the field of business education (Forray & Leigh, 2012)

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has stated that the PRME program has the vision to design the leaders of tomorrow, embodying innovative thinking to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (Haertle et al., 2017). This program also aims to equip students with a better perception of the current economic climate to participate in reforms and changes for a better future.

One of the objectives of PRME is to build international momentum and promote good leadership in higher education institutions in terms of responsible management. Through the PRME initiative, business schools are committed to ensuring the transmission of the required skills to future decision-makers and managers, aligning with the SDGs and converging higher education institutions with the activities of the UN Global Compact. In addition, the academic staff within the business schools play a leading role in sharing the principles related to responsible management education (Beddewela et al., 2017).

This program also operates in a parallel manner with the United Nations Global Compact, intending to converge and unify the visions of business schools and pooling their efforts. With over 800 institutions voluntarily signing on worldwide, PRME is thus positioned as the largest interaction between higher education institutions and the United Nations.

According to Burchell et al., 2015, PRME is built around four main themes, namely:

- Creation of a channel for exchange and debate
- Establishing a framework for monitoring and evaluating progress
- Promotion of positive changes and mutations
- Strengthening external communication.

The United Nations has also set six major principles of PRME, namely:

- The purpose: being to develop and strengthen the capacities of students to become future leaders operating for an inclusive and sustainable economy.
- The values: through the integration of social responsibility values into business school curricula and academic activities.
- Method: New educational processes and environments will be created to foster learning for responsible leadership.
- Research: Theoretical and empirical research will be conducted to analyze the impact of business on the creation of economic, social, and environmental values.
- Partnership: through the exchange with managers of private companies about their challenges regarding social and environmental responsibilities.
- Dialogue: exchanges will be facilitated between students, professors, companies, media, policymakers, civil society, and other stakeholders on topics mainly related to sustainability and social responsibility.

6. Suggested theoretical model

Considered as sources of knowledge and learning, higher education institutions must set an example in terms of transparency, fairness, respect for human rights, and ethical behavior (Gomez 2014). Through socially responsible practices and ethics-based regulation, higher education institutions stimulate moral and social values in students, as well as the prioritization of general interest over self-interest (Baakil, Aboulaaguig, 2017).

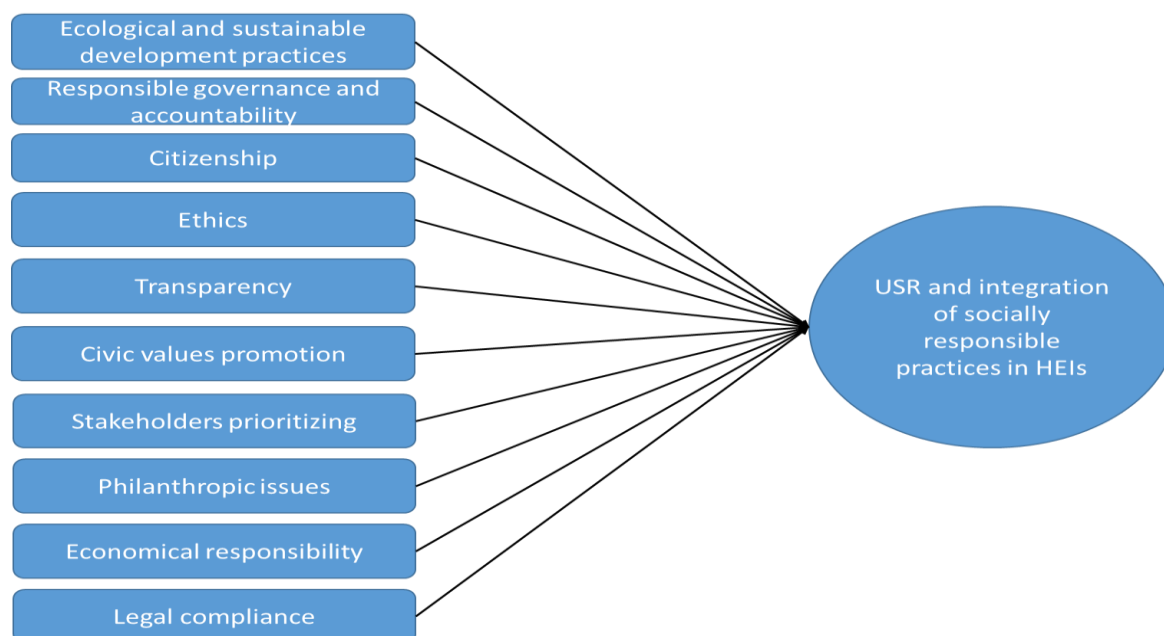
Via their multiple programs and activities, universities are considered as an engine of the promotion of ecological and sustainable practices in favor of the environment. In addition, socially responsible practices need having actors fully acquiring citizenship, civic and ethical values. In addition, transparency occupies a prior position in the social responsibility integration process. To be successfully achieved, this process requires the implication of all the internal and external university stakeholders. For this purpose, these stakeholders also need to acquire the above-cited values.

Universities need as well to fulfill their philanthropic issues to achieve social responsibility integration, mainly linking the organizational performance with the humanitarian aspect and by tackling society via solidarity and volunteering activities. In addition, the economic responsibility would positively influence the financial performance of universities and their competitiveness as well. Legal compliance is also a crucial aspect to achieve a total integration of socially responsible practices insofar as universities have to respect national and international regulation and even may beyond those regulations required limits.

Finally, we can consider that good and responsible governance based on accountability are the key factors to achieve optimal integration of socially responsible practices at universities.

The following figure proposes the theoretical model we proposed based on our previous analyses.

Figure 1: Responsibility levels to integrate socially responsible practices in HEIs.



Source: Authors

7. Conclusion

Today, sustainability has become a major issue for HEIs. As a result, they have begun to pay special attention to the extra-financial component as part of management objectives, to promote the environmental and social performance of said institutions (Barbot & Juban, 2018). Faced with multiple social and environmental challenges, universities are increasingly called upon to respond to sustainable development issues and challenges through RDI (Research-Development-Innovation) actions. The embodiment of socially responsible practices by higher education institutions is the result of engaging in actions related to sustainable development, social equity and equality, justice, dignity, civic responsibility, respect for diversity, and support for human rights (Luangsay-Catelin & Gasner-Bouquet, 2018).

In this paper, we aimed to tackle the issue of the integration of socially responsible practices in HEIs. For this aim, we first presented the evolution of the university frame and its changing context. Secondly, we explored the USR by proceeding first hand to a comparison with the CSR concept, then we presented in a second hand the different definitions and aspects of the USR concept. After that, we discussed the governance and stakeholders, as major factors for the integration of socially responsible practices in HEIs.

Then, we presented the PRME as a concrete example of the integration of socially responsible practices in business schools, and which would be an inspiration for the HEIs in the multiple training fields and specialties to proceed in the same way.

Finally, and based on multiple aspects presented and discussed in our article, we analyzed the main factors that would facilitate the integration of socially responsible practices in HEIs, and we consequently suggested a theoretical model that sums up our analysis.

The purpose of this article has been to present a holistic view of the concept of USR and the integration of socially responsible practices within HEIs. This is said; this article as well as future theoretical and exploratory studies would undoubtedly enable policymakers as well as different stakeholders belonging to the higher education sector to better understand the topic of USR and consequently encourage them to take more steps to integrate socially responsible practices in HEIs.

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