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**More than just mind-games.  
University social responsibility (USP)  
And its practical applications**

**Więcej niż tylko gry umysłowe.  
Społeczna odpowiedzialność uniwersytetu  
(USP) i jej praktyczne zastosowania**

USR interpretowana zarówno jako Społeczna Odpowiedzialność Uniwersytetu i Zrównoważona Odpowiedzialność Uniwersytetu (w świetle Celów Zrównoważonego Rozwoju ONZ) powstała jako wariant Społecznej Zrównoważonej Odpowiedzialności Biznesu na przełomie wieków i od tego czasu nabrała rozpędu, nie tylko dzięki godnym pochwały wysiłkom Sieci USR. USR jest postrzegane jako odpowiedź na wiele kwestii, którymi zajmują się współczesne uniwersytety i ich interesariusze. Jest to między innymi oprócz umasowienia edukacji, malejących funduszy, rosnącej konkurencji nadanie uniwersytetom profilu, oblicza i roli obywateli korporacyjnych, odgrywanie roli w rozwoju lokalnym i regionalnym (zwłaszcza w sferach ESG), wypełnianie luki między teorią a praktyką i coraz pilniejszym dla studentów życiem szkolnym i zawodowym, służenie jako instytucje nie tylko do kształcenia absolwentów świadomych SDG i badań, lecz także jako think-tanki i czynniki napędzające rozwój lokalny i regionalny.

Tworzenie i ukierunkowanie programów USR pozostawiono na całym świecie głównie uniwersytetom i instytucjom szkolnictwa wyższego oraz samym badaniom. Wysiłki mające na celu opracowanie kryteriów standaryzacji i – ostatecznie – certyfikacji projektów USR, zakończyły się minimalnym sukcesem, zarówno z powodu nie zawsze dobrze udokumentowanego bogactwa podejść i kierunków z jednej strony, jak i widocznego braku chęci regulacyjnych po stronie rządowej i międzyrządowej.

Konserwatywna interpretacja wolności akademickiej i samodzielności mogła do tej pory uniemożliwić współpracę wykraczającą poza raportowanie, tworzenie regionalnych i globalnych sieci oraz inicjowanie sporadycznych wspólnych programów. Ministerstwa Edukacji, Nauki i Technologii mogą być dotknięte, ale nie zaangażowane. Rząd Tajwanu w swojej polityce zorientowanej na południe wybrał inne podejście. USR, niegdyś zidentyfikowany jako istotny czynnik napędzający rozwój lokalny i międzynarodowy, od 2017 r. podlega Ministerstwu Edukacji, a 116 uniwersytetów uczestniczy obecnie w 220 projektach.

Większość znanych autorom programów USR została opracowana i zrealizowana w warunkach względnej wolności akademickiej przy braku silnie motywowanej krajowej polityki USR. W tym artykule proponujemy udokumentować i przeanalizować ich przeciwieństwo – krajowy program USR, istniejący głównie z powodu podejścia odgórnego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** USR, zarządzanie USR, USR i SDGs, rozwój regionalny, raportowanie USR, ewaluacja USR, koordynacja USR, CSR, USR jako czynnik polityki zagranicznej i rozwojowej.

USR interpretable both as University Social Responsibility and University Sustainability Responsibility (in light of the UN Sustainable Development Goals) came into being as variant of Corporate Social/Sustainability Responsibility around the turn of the century and has since picked up momentum, not least thanks to the laudable efforts of the USR Network. USR is seen as addressing a multitude of issues contemporary universities and their stakeholders are concerned with. These are int.al., apart from the massification of education, diminishing funds, increasing competition: giving universities a profile, face and role as corporate citizens, playing a role in local and regional development (especially in the ESG spheres), bridging the gap between theory and practice, (and of increasing urgency for students) school and professional life, serving as institutions not only for education of SDG-conscious graduates and research, but also as think tanks and drivers for local and regional development.

The creation and orientation of USR programs has been globally left mostly to universities and institutions of higher learning and research themselves. Efforts to come up with criteria for standardization

and – eventually – certification of USR projects have been of minimal success, both because of the not always well documented very wealth of approaches and orientations on the one hand, and an apparent lack of regulatory appetite on the governmental and inter-governmental side on the other.

A conservative interpretation of academic freedom and self-reliance may so far have precluded concertation beyond reporting, the creation of regional and global networks, and the initiation of occasional joint programs. Ministries of Education, Science and Technology may be affected, but not involved. The Taiwanese government, in its Southbound Policy orientation, has chosen a different approach. USR, once identified as an essential driver of local and international development, has since 2017 been concerted under the Ministry of Education with 116 universities now contributing 220 projects.

Most USR programs known to the author were developed and delivered in relative academic freedom in the absence of a heavily incentivized national USR policy. In this article we propose to document and analyze their opposite – a national USR program existing mainly because of a top-down approach.

**Key words:** USR, USR management, USR and SDGs, regional development, USR reporting, USR evaluation, USR coordination, CSR, USR as foreign and development policy factor.

## USR and CSR

USR ('University Social Responsibility', sometimes: 'University Sustainability Responsibility') is an application and extension of the concept of CSR ('Corporate Social Responsibility') which term refers to the social responsibilities of all businesspeople, or rather: businesses. CSR integrates and surpasses (voluntary) philanthropic activities by identifying 'responsibilities'. These may, in their application, still involve elements of volition and choice, but are seen as considerably more binding than philanthropic activities which depend solely on the goodness of hearts of successful industrialists. Voluntary and often religiously motivated philanthropic activities were known throughout the Middle Ages and have taken on new dimensions since the early days of industrialization.

CSR becomes even more binding once the notion of businesses as ‘corporate citizens’ is added. Corporate citizenship refers to and identifies responsibilities toward and active participation in society. Corporate citizenship programs and activities are becoming increasingly important as governments seek and incentivize cooperation on such, and investors seek out companies which distinct socially responsible profiles. Such profiles may refer to the ESG (Environment, Social, Governance) catalogue, but may also surpass it<sup>1</sup>. Customers and customer associations are increasingly considering themselves as stakeholders and pay attention to CSR profiles as well.

A corporate citizen, as opposed to a free rider, is expected to engage in activities of social benefit. Starting ‘at home’, corporate citizen companies will respect individuality and diversity of their employees, offer safe and inviting workplaces, and invest in the wellbeing of their employees. Ideally CSR programs and activities on behalf of societal groups and/or society at large will be joined to such aspects of ‘housekeeping’ and stakeholder consideration, and again ideally as part of a long-term commitment the corporate citizen is making, involving a dedicated budget, a longer-term

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<sup>1</sup> CSR commitments have also been referred to as ‘the triple bottom line’ (TBL), corporate companies adhering to the TBL are also called TBL-businesses. The term ‘3 P’, designed to enhance sustainability, stands for People, Planet and Profit. A 3P Triple Bottom Line Company is then (see Arlette Measures, updated January 20, 2022) ‘a company which adheres to a business model fostering social responsibility and sustainability among businesses. The corporations who adopt these standards are known as “triple bottom line,” or TBL, companies. This term is attributed to John Elkington, founder of the consulting firm SustainAbility, and author of “Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business”, The three Ps in sustainability stand for People, Planet and Profit.

**People: Finding Value in Work:** A triple bottom line organization takes steps to ensure that its operations benefit the company’s employees as well as the community in which it conducts business. Human resources managers of TBL entities are concerned not just with providing adequate compensation to its workers, but also with creating a safe and pleasant working environment and helping employees find value in their work. As Harvard Business School reports, TBL companies actively seek positive ways to contribute to the community through activities, such as charitable contributions, education programs and equal opportunity employment.

**Planet: Helping the Environment:** A TBL company avoids any activities that harm the environment and looks for ways to reduce any negative impact its operations may have on the ecosystem. It controls its energy consumption and takes steps to reduce its carbon emissions. Many TBL companies go beyond these basic measures by taking advantage of other means of sustainable development, such as using wind power. Many of these practices actually increase a company’s profitability while contributing to the health of our planet.

**Profit: Balancing Profitability and Social Impacts –** In the past, profitability was considered the only important factor in a company’s bottom line, but businesses today have had to expand their thinking in this regard. That’s because today’s commercial world is interconnected, and it is shortsighted to think about profit as something that is unrelated to the broader social impacts of what a company does.

**Governing the 3Ps- Built into the 3P model is the concept of governance.** At a macro level, some national governments have begun creating legislation and incentives, such as tax reductions to ensure that companies follow 3P sustainability practices. Organizations such as the Global Reporting Initiative are working toward global corporate responsibility’ (Measures, 2022).

plan, and a communication strategy. To do the good and right thing does not preclude bringing additional profit to the agent of such goodness.

## CSR and Corporate Citizenship

CSR and Corporate Citizenship refer to similar legal requirements and societal obligations, values and ethical commitments. Corporate Citizenship was entered into the business and academic discussion in 1980 (Utkarsh Jhingan<sup>2</sup>). It is defined as the way a company interprets and ‘exercises its rights, obligations, privileges and overall corporate responsibility within the neighboring and global environment’ (op. cit.). Whereas some authors view CSR and Corporate Citizenship as synonymous, others have observed that Corporate Citizenship refers to internal (organizational) commitments, whereas CSR points towards a company’s external profile of commitments for sustainability, environment and governance wherever possible. The development of a CSR strategy may thus involve the following four elements<sup>3</sup> (CSR, 2022):

- ‘The impact of the company’s products and services.
- The impact of business operations, including the environment, sustainability, green practices, inclusion, and diversity.
- The impact of any corporate citizenship programs on the local community.
- The impact on the workforce. Organizations have a duty toward their employees. CSR also involves promoting the health and wellbeing of workers’.

A business acts as a corporate citizen by implementing CSR obligations. *Becoming* a corporate citizen involves a series of steps (CSR, 2022): the journey starts with a company making efforts to identify and meet their CSR obligations. The company actively develops ‘policies and projects so that operations and employees contribute positively to the community’ (engagement stage). At the innovative stage, the company ‘gains confidence and gets creative in finding ways to implement CSR’.

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<sup>2</sup> Jhingan U., *Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Citizenship – Analyzing the difference*. March 5, 2018 <https://blog.ipleaders.in/corporate-social-responsibility-and-corporate-citizenship/#:~:text=The%20main%20elements%20of%20corporate,of%20CSR%20and%20sustainability%20are>

<sup>3</sup> N.N., ‘CSR and Corporate Citizenship: What Every SME Needs to Know’. 10 Nov. 2022. <https://www.myhubintranet.com/corporate-citizenship/>

At the integration stage it has matured to sustain a comprehensive, integrated CSR strategy. And at the transformation stage the business has ‘fully grasped CSR and is actively working as an excellent corporate citizen’ (op. cit).

*Why are CSR and Corporate Citizenship not negligible?* Research shows that most citizens in industrialized countries believe that businesses should actively commit to bringing about social change, environmental and energy sustainability, and adhere to and promote principles of good governance, as shown in *15 Eye-Opening Corporate Social Responsibility Statistics* by Tim Stobierski<sup>4</sup>. Not only are consumers reportedly – as per the same Harvard Business School study 77 percent of consumers – ‘motivated to purchase from organizations committed to making the world better’ (CSR, 2022), but also investors are affected by companies’ CSR choices – according to one survey<sup>5</sup>, 73 percent of investors report that ‘efforts to enhance the environment and society affect their investment choices’ – ‘Investors use what’s called ESG (environmental, social, and governance) factors to determine how far advanced organizations are with sustainability. They want to put their dollars where it will do the most good’ (CSR, 2022). Obviously not only businesses are expected to show civic spirit, but consumers themselves increasingly act as critical and responsible *citizens*.

CSR and Corporate Citizenship thus serve multiple purposes. A muscular CSR profile can be used to

- ‘boost a brand reputation,
- increase employee retention,
- make recruitment more effective,
- increase customer loyalty, and finally:
- more cost-effective, sustainable operations and green practices’ (CSR, 2022).

CSR and corporate citizenship are profiles that not only big corporations but also SMEs may consider and find attainable. They may involve (CSR 2022) seemingly minor ‘environmental projects such as introducing

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<sup>4</sup> <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/corporate-social-responsibility-statistics>. While the concept of CSR has been around for decades, recent developments and the increased social and environmental awareness of younger generations have led to a strong demand for proven CSR commitments by leading businesses. An ‘estimated 90 percent of companies on the S&P 500 index published a CSR report in 2019, compared to just 20 percent in 2011’ (Stobierski).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.aflac.com/docs/about-aflac/csr-survey-assets/2019-aflac-csr-infographic-and-survey.pdf>

energy/saving lighting, philanthropy, ethical labor projects, volunteering, employee health and well-being projects’.

The list of CSR trends is constantly growing. While some of the CSR activities listed above may refer to all-time desirables such as employee health and well-being, recent developments have made it clear that supply chain safety and security are a priority. Consumer associations and NGOs are increasingly scrutinizing cases of reported greenwashing. A further general trend is more extensive CSR reporting, and, in certain countries such as Denmark, active governmental involvement in the structuring of CSR policies of major companies.

Corporate Social Responsibility, in its mature and sincere form, is then a stakeholder-oriented management concept, whereby businesses embrace social, environmental and governance concerns in their business operations. By now, CSR is an essential part of a company’s brand perception<sup>6</sup>.

## From CSR to USR

CSR – after a slow beginning – and Corporate Citizenship are well defined and documented and by now also rooted in the Western business ethics discourse. But how do/did we get from Corporate Social Responsibility to University Social Responsibility? And did universities, as institutions of higher learning, and thus with a clear education mandate, not already, and always, have social responsibility, before the CSR discourse even started, namely in the production of socially competent graduates and applicable research?<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Government mandated CSR is not limited to the industrialized countries of the so-called ‘West’. Shristi Rao (*A brief history: How CSR came into existence?*) reports in *The CSR Universe* <https://thecsr.universe.com/articles/a-brief-history-how-csr-came-into-existence#:~:text=helping%20the%20dispossessed.,THE%20TERM%20WAS%20COINED%20FIRST%20IN%201953.,back%20to%20the%20Industrial%20Revolution.>) that ‘With the introduction of the 2013 Companies Act, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) became the buzzword of business in India. For the first time in the history of the country, the Act made donations of private corporations to social welfare mandatory. As per it, all companies with net worth above Rs 500 crore, turnover over Rs 1,000 crore, or net profit over Rs 5 crore are required to spend at least 2 per cent of their annual profits (averaged over 3 years). Section 135 of the Act which mandates the CSR donation also asks companies to establish a CSR committee to oversee the spending’. (Our italics, PhF).

<sup>7</sup> The importance of Latin American and especially Chilean (from 2001) universities for the early development of the USR concept and program has been pointed out by various authors, *see e.g.*, Gomez, Lina, ‘The Importance of University Social Responsibility in Hispanic America: A Responsible Trend in Developing Countries’, pp. 241-268, in: *Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability: Emerging Trends in Developing Economies. Critical Studies on Corporate Responsibility, Governance and Sustainability*, Vol. 8. 2014 Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Universities have traditionally been a pillar of human development. They have also increasingly embraced curricula on business ethics and CSR, and one of their products: graduates, clearly is of social and human development relevance, while research again may focus on aspects of human development, environment, the social sphere, and governance.

More recently, universities have experienced significant changes in their operational environment. As pointed out by Dr. Teay Shawyun ‘... through insufficiency of public funding, greater mobility and internationalization, corporatization ... and massification of education, the university is acting more like an organization or firm’ (‘From CSR to USR: A Strategic USR Management Framework’, in 2011, *Proceedings of the 7th QS-APPLE Conference Manila, 16th -18th November 2011*. Proceedings published June 2012, p.1). This obviously holds true especially for private universities.

For social responsibility initiatives to be designed and delivered, universities need to understand and re-invent themselves as corporate citizens – more than just places providing education and enabling research, knowledge production and dissemination. A variety of terms has been proposed by different authors to describe USR activities, such as *community outreach, community engagement, civic engagement and capacity building, public engagement* etc. These activities may be educational in a larger sense; they also surpass the original nature (19th century ‘Humboldtian’ definition) of a university’s services and activities and add elements of ethical and ‘civic’ dimensions. These may still be filled with individual meaning depending on a university’s profile and ambition. It is, however, no longer questionable that universities do have such responsibilities and hence should design sets of USR initiatives. Along with the notion of ‘corporate citizenship’ universities also see themselves exposed now to demands of greater transparency and accountability, respect for human rights and diversity not only vis a vis their students and external stakeholders, but their own employees as well.

Ali *et al.* (2021), in their extensive comparison of USR activities throughout the developed and developing world have found that the central theme is ‘a moral engagement of the universities as internal stakeholders cooperating with outside stakeholders for the betterment of society and community it exists in’ (see also Andrades Pena *et al.* 2018). Stakeholders are not only students, staff, alumni, but also interested parties *outside* the campuses. The production of dependable elites for



the society is one important aspect of the work of universities, but the promotion of an adequate understanding of human rights and civic freedoms, sustainability in the large sense proposed by the SDGs, and good governance is not limited to life on the campus. And neither is the provision of services in favor of the common good.

## A Reference Framework for USR?

Various attempts at establishing a normative or regulatory reference framework for the USR, *int.al.* in the framework of the EU-USR project (<http://www.eu-usr.eu>), have been made based on a perceived need for a common social responsibility strategy for all European universities:

*'The EU-USR project created a European model to enhance social responsibility of universities in a long-term perspective. To this end, the project uses a bottom-up approach by collecting examples of good practice from across Europe and using these to help inform the development, piloting and validation of a set of completely new benchmark standards. These standards are providing a Common Reference Framework for University Social Responsibility across the European Higher Education Area that is consistent with USR being a Core Competence of European universities by covering the following four areas: Research, Teaching, Support for Learning and Public Engagement'<sup>8</sup> (see Gabriel Dima, 'Reference Framework for University Social Responsibility', Balkan Region Conference on Engineering and Business Education: 2017 de Gruyter (p. 9) *Towards Building an European Common Reference Framework for University Social Responsibility*).*

The EU-USR project sought to establish a European framework allowing for the development of networks among European universities, enhancing social action and pooling experience on policy and practices in areas such as

- Organizational governance
- Labor practices
- Environment
- Fair operating practices
- Consumer issues

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<sup>8</sup> See also University Social Responsibility: A Common European Reference Framework. Final Public Report of the EU-USR Project, 52709-LLP-2012-1-RO-ERASMUS-ESIN, February 2015.

- Community involvement and development
- Human rights and democratic citizenship’  
(Dima, 2015, p. 1 – note that the project was brought to conclusion *before* the declaration of the Sustainable Development Goals, PhF).  
The main objectives of the project were thus to come up with
- ‘A fit-for-purpose definition of University Social Responsibility for the EHEA
- Identification, analysis and presentation of current practice
- Creation of a set of Benchmark Standards for USR across the EHEA
- A strategy for mainstreaming the approach (op. cit., p.1)<sup>9</sup>.

The project propounds Benchmarking Standards in four areas: research, teaching, support for learning and public engagement, governance, environmental and societal sustainability, and fair practices (p. 4).

The project’s ‘inductive’ approach, starting from the ‘identification, collection and analysis of practice, yielded large fields of data on what European universities understood to be USR. Whereas no shortage of declarations on the social responsibilities was observed, authors found that existing standards schemes were ‘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’ (p. 6) (Brian Martin, ‘The idea of a set of benchmark standards for University Social Responsibility’, in Dima 2015, 6-7).

Benchmark proposals were worked out in two different versions and subjected to stakeholder consultation (Carmen Osuna, Aurora Megaidés ‘Is there Support for a Set of Benchmark Standards for University Social Responsibility in Europe?’, in Dima 2015, pp. 7-10). Informants in the

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<sup>9</sup> Authors Amorim *et al.* (2015, 3ff.) cite as policy sources for a standardized reference system on the one hand ministerial declarations of London (2007) and Leuven (2009) on the social dimension of the European Higher Education Area, while the Eurydice reports of 1999 and 2011) were seen as showing a ‘huge diversity of policies and practices across countries’; it is rather in the efforts of various international initiatives and bodies such as the ISO 260000 (‘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’ that the authors find encouragement and inspiration (op. cit., p. 3).

European-level focus-group – while strongly supporting the development of Benchmark Standards 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’ (op. cit., p. 9).

In the further pursuit of their project, authors found their original hope of being able to identify ‘good practice’ across different institutions thwarted due to the wide varieties of understandings of and approaches to USR. The orientation therefore switched from ‘a norm-referencing approach ... to a criterion-referencing approach’ (Brian Martin, in Dima 2015, p. 10).

The project thus concluded with the presentation of benchmark standards providing ‘a common reference framework for University Social Responsibility across the European Higher Education Area, consistent with USR being a *core competence*’ (Martin, in Dima 2015, p.11) collectively. Four standards were identified, each with a set of criteria:

- Research, Teaching, Support for Learning and Public Engagement;
- Governance – ‘principles of social responsibility respected throughout institutional policy, strategy, procedures and processes. They permeate all levels, as an integral element of management accountability and stakeholder engagement’ (op. cit., p. 11f.);
- 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’ (p. 12).
- Fair Practices (p.13) – 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’ (p. 13).

What remains of the EU-USR project is on the one hand a model and tools for collaborative activities. On the other there remains an interest in creating a management system for ‘USR Screening and assessment’ (de Carvalho, in Dima 2015, p. 14). A third dimension is web-technology based infrastructure.

The *EU-USR Manifesto* (pp. 18f.) promotes the establishment of a lasting network of USR stakeholders. The project of a possible regulation and standardization of USR projects seems, however, not to have whetted European institutions’ appetite.

## The USR Global Network

CSR and USR are originally Western concepts which have spread to other continents and thus also parts of Asia. As in the West, USR type projects do not presuppose the existence of a USR strategy, nor require adequate reporting. On the contrary, strategies and the projects and activities based on them remain limited. USR has also been understood as the responsibility of a university to include CSR in its curriculum, or to educate students to become responsible citizens<sup>10</sup>.

The USR Network, established in 2015, has its secretariate at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Its mission is to serve as an ‘effective collaborative platform for all USR Network members in pursuit and fulfilment of university social responsibility’, including the design of collaborative projects with varied scopes and orientations. It has been advised since 2017 by a Senior Advisor of USRN provides USRN – Professor em. Robert Hollister, previous Executive Director of the Talloires Network of Engaged Universities and founding Dean of Tisch College of Civic Life of Tufts University<sup>11</sup>. Currently the USRN comprises 20 leading universities as its members. These universities are: UNSW Sydney, University of São Paulo, Simon Fraser University, Beijing Normal University, Peking University, Sichuan University, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University [Network Chair], University of Iceland, University of Haifa, Kyoto University, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Ateneo de Manila University, Rhodes University, University of Pretoria, Yonsei University, Clare Hall, University of Cambridge, The University of Manchester, Tufts University, Washington University in St. Louis (<https://usrsummit2022.org/programme/>). Among the numerous contributions of the USR Global Network to a deepening understanding of USR is the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to raise awareness of USR, promote policy frameworks for universities’ social and civic engagement. 2018.

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<sup>10</sup> See *e.g.*, Frances James 2019 in: How Universities Can Encourage Social Responsibility in Their Students.

<sup>11</sup> Professor Hollister is co-editor of *University Social Responsibility and Quality of Life: A Global Survey of Concepts and Experiences*, co-author of *The Engaged University: International Perspectives on Civic Engagement and of Development Politics*, and co-editor and contributing author of *Governing, Leading and Managing Nonprofit Organizations*; *Cities of the Mind*; *Neighborhood Policy and Planning*; and *Neighborhood Health Centers*.

## USR and State Institutions – The Concerted Approach

Should universities be left to design and deliver their USR policies and programs in full academic freedom, possibly limited and oriented only by and through their exchange with their stakeholders, or should governmental institutions such as Ministries of Education and/or Science and Technology take influence? And if the latter, should USR programs become (a Track-2) part of the foreign and development policy of a government, and can they then still be called ‘USR’ programs?

Taiwan is a case in point, as the government there has made USR a priority, complete with a government agency and a five-year plan (this first two-phase plan ending in 2022, with a third phase currently under construction). USR took root in Taiwan relatively late, but now involves more than half of the universities in Taiwan – in 2021 the long-term assessment plan for USR covered 93 universities out of the 149 existing in Taiwan.

Governmental Promotion of University Social Responsibility in Taiwan

From 2017/8, the government of Taiwan has been promoting USR projects, inviting universities to become active promoters of and contributors to local and regional development and sustainability. The planned projects focus on people and their local development and sustainability needs and interests which may also include issues of manufacturing quality, production capacity, product design, business, marketing, environmental protection, education, and community development. The Ministry of Education provides incentives to generate and coordinate universities’ interests.

In a first phase universities were encouraged to propose projects within 5 development areas:

- Environmental protection and revitalization
- Cooperation with local industries
- Sustainability
- Food production and safety
- Long-term care, public health, and other social obligations.

A second phase (2020-2022) introduced two additional project themes:

- regional revitalization and
- global connections.

Universities were encouraged to build both local connections and international/global links.

Five development strategies were initiated and sustained:

1. Guiding instructors and students to take part in innovation: Universities were encouraged to develop new coursework and activities centered on their localities, students steered towards self-directed study, on-site hands-on learning, and a cooperative approach of study. Meanwhile, faculty were pushed to cooperate with colleagues across multiple disciplines.
2. Strengthening connections among universities and regional industries: Universities were urged to develop innovative, integrated and multi-disciplinary technology centered on users and guided by local needs. The social value of cooperation between academia and industry was emphasized, as universities helped companies upgrade technology and move up the value-chain.
3. Increasing the integration of regional resources: Public and private regional resources were linked through universities, as schools come together with public agencies and private businesses to develop a partnership and mutual assistance which accelerated system transformation and the integration of regional resources.
4. Invigorating networks for local exchanges: Through any number of mechanisms, universities were encouraging faculty and students to engage in public discourse with local interests, in order to draw the public into discussions on issues of regional development, develop the region's unique strengths, and design mechanisms to align supply and demand.
5. Looking abroad to expand horizons: Universities were encouraged to increase international engagements and enhance global links. With firmly rooted local foundations, schools were encouraged to seek greater participation in the global community (Source: Department of Information Services, Executive Yuan, Taiwan).

Since 2017, 116 out of 152 universities in Taiwan with 1.23 million students and 40.000 faculty have joined the MoE promoted USR program; 220 projects fostering joint development between campuses and communities through innovative education and research activities were endorsed. Projects and outcomes have been regularly documented at so-called 'USR Exhibitions' (<https://usr.moe.gov.tw/en/report/media/180>). The MoE also created a network of coordination offices, while universities

were equally encouraged to create planning and implementation cells within their managerial structures<sup>12</sup>.

While some projects are based on personal engagements of individual faculty and one-department interests, the more ambitious projects sought to combine forces and expertise from different departments and universities to focus on problem clusters, and reach out into the international domain:

Thus *Hsiuping University of Science and Technology* focused on addressing a regional agricultural issue of labor shortage, unbalanced production, indecisive marketing, and an aging active labor force – the project ultimately engaged six universities in the Taichung-Changhua-Nantou region in proposing agricultural reform using location based services (LBS), involving departments of electronic machinery, information science, marketing, and digital media design in cooperation with local farmers. Students and their local peers also participated in the set-up of on-line shopping start-ups, thus experiencing and learning first-hand about the agricultural production cycle, including product design and marketing via start-up local businesses. Universities thus produce guidance and invest resources into the revitalization of local agricultural production with modern means. Local/regional revitalization projects not only (re-) create employment opportunities for the local agricultural workers but may also help students to find their professional vocation ‘by doing’, thus retaining not only the agricultural labor force, but also experts in marketing and forms of industrialized agriculture.

In a similarly multi-dimensional project, *National Kaohsiung University of Science and Technology* teamed up with a community in Yanchao to create new agricultural opportunities by replacing conventional farming with technology-supported agriculture, improving soil quality, and solving staff shortage with IT-based employment ‘matchmaking’. Design and marketing courses were also offered to create value for agricultural waste in an innovative way (Source: Cheers magazine). Some NKUST projects were designed and executed in cooperation with universities in Japan ([https://eng.nkust.edu.tw/p/406-1131-48001\\_r11.php?Lang=en](https://eng.nkust.edu.tw/p/406-1131-48001_r11.php?Lang=en)).

Traditional resources and technology were activated for the *Bamboo and Bamboo Charcoal Innovation Project: Sustainable Consumption and*

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<sup>12</sup> 90% of the institutes involved are also said to have set up incentive schemes for faculty, such as reduction of teaching hours, and merit pay.

*Production*, carried out by National Chung Cheng University in support of the revitalization of the local bamboo industry. The project seeks to link the industry with local culture revitalization, technological innovation, circular agriculture application, and innovative service development to stimulate the industry under the condition of protecting important environmental resources. The concept of a Smart Poultry Farm was developed, built on bamboo charcoal effective in removing unwelcome odors, along with a modern farming system. The largest turkey farm in Taiwan adopted this Smart Poultry Farm concept (for more information on bamboo-based technology, including circular agriculture, *see* Taiwan USR-Bamboo and Bamboo Charcoal Innovation (ccu.edu.tw)).

National Chi-Nan University developed energy-saving production and harvesting methods for the universally liked water bamboo in Central Taiwan (<https://usr.moe.gov.tw/en/report/media/177>) by adapting LED technology to the task, thus effectuating a 75% reduction of energy cost, and a considerable reduction of light pollution.

*National Taiwan Ocean University* designed and delivered a project named ‘Prosperity for Fishermen, Fishing Village and Fishery: International Blue Economic Pilot Zones’. The fishing industry in Taiwan is no longer thriving due to ocean pollution, climate change and overfishing. The university followed the principle ‘Blue Economy and Sustainability for Taiwan’, identified local challenges, and addressed them in collaboration with government, industry, academia, research and social organizations. Teams specialized in restoration, conservation, food safety, ecotourism, biotechnology, development studies and social practice designed a regional development strategy along with relevant R&D projects to establish a Pilot International Blue Economic Zone.

Taiwan Tech, in its ‘Engineer in Action’ program reached out to partner institutions in Vietnam and Indonesia, while also mobilizing alumni connections. Like other universities, Taiwan Tech has integrated social service requirements into its undergraduate curricula – since 2017, it has been a requirement for undergraduates to earn one credit in social projects in the course of their studies.

The *Taiwan Tech Engineer in Action* (EIA) program, launched in 2017 by the College of Engineering, has implemented several projects in Indonesia and Vietnam in cooperation with partner schools Widya Mandala Catholic University the Institute Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember, and Can Tho University. One of the villages receiving support was Currah



Cottok in Indonesia's Surabaya District, a dry area that often suffers from droughts. EIA teams worked on the village irrigation system in 2018 and 2019 and designed an efficient mobile sprinkler system to improve irrigation efficiency. Under Covid 19, the EIA implemented a project in Dongao, Yilan county in East Taiwan in mostly aboriginal territory. Teams designed ecological channels and set up an intelligent monitoring system for slope stability in Qalang Skikun which also serves the purpose of disaster prevention – villages on the East coast are often struck by typhoons and other natural disasters. For Taiwan Tech cooperation with Japanese universities see also Visit to Kawakami Village, Nara with USR Team of Taiwan Tech New type of iPBL will start soon! | OSAKA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (oit.ac.jp).

A series of projects also focusses on the elderly and their (special) needs within a rapidly ageing population. Apart from health care in depopulating areas there is also the aspect of dementia and building dementia-friendly towns to be considered. Asia University's USR project 'Building an Elderly Dementia-Friendly Town: Dementia and Cognitive Ability x Wisdom Upgrade x Intelligent Assistance' does exactly that.

## Reporting and Evaluation

Reporting on USR projects at the global level has remained problematic, ever since Dabrowski and Jastrzebska observed a deficit in available data in 2019 (Dabrowski Tomasz, Ewa Jastrzebska, 'University Social Responsibility Strategies', in e-mentor 5/77 2019, pp. 4-12). This may be explained by the fact that reporting is not very common everywhere, except in Europe and the US (and Taiwan in Asia). Nevertheless, in 2019 reports from 133 universities from 32 countries could be found in [www.globalreporting.org](http://www.globalreporting.org) (op. cit.).

Reporting on the Taiwan USR projects in English is (not too readily) available. One will, however, be surprised to find on the MoE website that the rubric 'Comprehensive USR Evaluation' refers not to the publication of ministerial criteria and data but to Common Wealth Magazine's

University Social Responsibility Ranking, proposing to evaluate universities from three aspects with four indicators of Excellence in Corporate Social Responsibility Award: corporate governance, corporate

commitment, social engagement and environmental protection (Comprehensive USR Evaluation -<https://usr.moe.gov.tw/en/report/media/187>).

## Conclusions

In this article we sought to show and discuss the governmental approach to USR project design and management. Though institutional influence-taking on the actual implementation of projects may have remained limited, and official and public laudations not been of universal interest, the official stipulation and endorsement of a comprehensive USR policy, the availability of incentive schemes, the support of university management, the recognition of work time invested, and the satisfaction of successful teamwork leading to provable improvement in the target areas. In the case of Taiwan, the DPP government's focus on welfare, human rights and civic freedoms, sustainability and regional development and pertinent deliverables from all ministerial departments has led to a massive mobilization of USR services many of which are of very acceptable quality and would most certainly never have been designed without such ministerial drumbeating.

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