THE UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY STRATEGY IN SUPPORTING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Jolanta KORKOSZ-GĘBSKA

Warsaw University of Technology; jolanta.gebska@pw.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-0793-6253

Purpose: The aim of the article is to present the University Social Responsibility (USR) strategy of the selected Polish technical university as a way of supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Design/methodology/approach: The goal was achieved by literature review, results of the questionnaire survey conducted at the university and participant observation during the work on the strategy as a member of the Team for Social Responsibility.

Findings: The results show that the USR strategy is an important tool in integrating the SDGs into the university's operations. It is particularly important for this type of organization and its three missions, which should support the sustainable development and meet the expectations of all stakeholder groups.

Research limitations/implications: Many foreign universities implement a sustainable development strategy but in Poland particular emphasis is placed on their social responsibility. Nevertheless, this type of strategy is missing, because the activities of most universities focus on compliance with the principles of the Declaration of University Social Responsibility, which is treated as the basic document setting the directions for the socially responsible functioning of the university.

Practical implications: The dissemination of the strategy may encourage other universities to prepare this type of document, and in the future create an opportunity to compare them, exchange good practices, as well as identify those sustainable development goals that are currently the least supported by universities.

Social implications: The activities of universities in supporting the SDGs have a huge impact on society and quality of life, especially if these goals are included in each of the three missions of the university.

Originality/value: Despite the great interest in social responsibility, only a few Polish universities have a separate USR strategy. Aspects related to social responsibility are usually included in the general strategy on development. Information presented in this article can be an inspiration for other universities that have not yet developed a strategy for social responsibility.

Keywords: university social responsibility, USR, sustainable development goals, strategy.

Category of the paper: Case study.

1. Introduction

Universities can support sustainable development in many ways, depending on their profile of activity. Technical universities can play a special role here, as apart from shaping certain attitudes and care for the natural environment, they can conduct research that is directly related to the implementation of the sustainable development goals. Although many foreign universities implement a sustainable development strategy, in Poland particular emphasis is placed on their socially responsible development. In fact, these two approaches have a common area, because the task of socially responsible organizations is to maximize their contribution to the sustainable development.

According to the Erfurt Declaration on University Autonomy: "the university must conduct itself as a responsible and cohesive community, not an anarchistic or irresponsible association" (Erfurt Declaration, 1996). In addition to education and research, nowadays universities are also required to carry out the so-called "third mission" (TM), that means that they should become "engines that contribute to the social, economic and cultural development of the regions in which they operate, by transferring knowledge and technologies to industry and to society at large" (Compagnuccia, Spigarelli, 2020, p. 1). It is worth emphasizing, that being an organization focused on education relevant to society and shaping attitudes that have the public good in mind does not automatically make a university socially responsible (Jastrzębska et al., 2019). Meeting these expectations requires the implementation of a social responsible strategy which should be consistent with the overall development strategy of the university.

Building broad public awareness of the role of universities in shaping the conditions for sustainable socio-economic development of the country is the main objective of the Declaration of University Social Responsibility, developed by the Working Group for University Social Responsibility, functioning within the Team for Sustainable Development and Corporate Social Responsibility, established at the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy. In 2017, the declaration was signed by 23 universities, while in 2019, 60 more universities joined as signatories. By 2022, the declaration has been signed by 160 universities.

The declaration can be an important and helpful tool in formulating a strategy of social responsibility of Polish universities. It contains the 12 principles relating to various aspects of university functioning, teaching and research activities, internal organization and dialogue with stakeholders (Ministry of Education and Science, 2020).

Currently, the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy is working on the evaluation of the inclusion of the principles and objectives of sustainable development in the activities of universities, reported by them.

2. The USR strategy – theoretical background

Although many people consider "social responsibility" to be synonymous with "sustainable development", it is worth adding, that despite numerous correlations, these are two different concepts (The International Organization for Standardization, 2010, p. 9). Due to the diversity of interpretations and understandings of what social responsibility and sustainable development are, it is worth referring to the definition placed in the ISO 26000:2010(E) standard, according to which: the term "sustainable development" means "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development is about integrating the goals of a high quality of life, health and prosperity with social justice and maintaining the earth's capacity to support life in all its diversity. These social, economic and environmental goals are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Sustainable development can be treated as a way of expressing the broader expectations of society as a whole" (The International Organization for Standardization, 2010, p. 4). In turn, the term "social responsibility" means "social responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, through transparent and ethical behaviour that (The International Organization for Standardization, 2010, p. 3):

- contributes to sustainable development, including health and the welfare of society,
- takes into account the expectations of stakeholders,
- is in compliance with applicable law and consistent with international norms of behaviour,
- is integrated throughout the organization and practised in its relationships".

"Social responsibility is closely linked to sustainable development. Because sustainable development is about the economic, social and environmental goals common to all people, it can be used as a way of summing up the broader expectations of society that need to be taken into account by organizations seeking to act responsibly. Therefore, an overarching objective of an organization's social responsibility should be to contribute to sustainable development" (The International Organization for Standardization, 2010, p. 9).

Therefore it can be assumed that the cited definition of social responsibility also applies to the higher education (HE) sector which can significantly support sustainable development. In a case of universities, we can talk about the university social responsibility (USR). The concept of the university social responsibility should be implemented through systematized and planned activities in the form of a special strategy.

The term "strategy" comes from the Greek word "stratēgós," consisting etymologically of two elements: "stratós" (the military camp) and "agein" (the leadership) (Obłój, 2001). Even though "it has originated in the military sphere, the term "strategy" has risen into

prominence in the business world since the 1960's to become a cornerstone of high-performing enterprises nowadays" (Aartsengel, Kurtoglu, 2013).

According to Chandler, the term strategy means "the determination of the basic long-term goals and objectives of an enterprise, and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals" (Chandler, 1962).

Strategy is "a specific concept of systemic action (action plan), consisting in formulating a set of long-term goals of the company and their modification depending on changes in its environment, defining the resources and means necessary to achieve these goals and ways of proceeding (principles of operation, directives, algorithms) ensuring their optimal distribution and use in order to respond flexibly to market challenges and provide the company with favourable conditions for existence and development" (Penc, 1997, p. 145).

Formulating the strategy requires an appropriate understanding of the social vision of the organization (Geryk, 2012). "A social vision is a statement about the company's social, environmental, and ethical obligations to communities and societies. It is designed to give direction and focus to the way a company will act in society as it goes about achieving its business goals and strategies (Burke, 2005).

"Based on the knowledge of the expectations and needs of its most important stakeholder groups, the company should build a social responsibility strategy that includes planned activities regarding relations with them and social and environmental activities. It must be long-term and consistent with the company's strategy, values and organizational culture. A properly formulated and implemented strategy contributes to the improvement of its strategic position and causes the company to be perceived as socially responsible" (Wachowiak, 2011).

The development and implementation of a social responsible strategy should be therefore the devoir of every university, in particular from its three missions perspective.

3. USR strategy of the Warsaw University of Technology

Work on the University's Social Responsibility Strategy of the Warsaw University of Technology (WUT) began in 2020 thanks to the establishment of the Social Responsibility Team. The team was composed of representatives of various groups of internal stakeholders, i.e. administrative staff, academic teachers, representatives of students and doctoral students. The draft strategy was assessed both by the Senate Committee for Professional Ethics and the University Council, and then it was adopted during the session of the WUT Senate on 23.06.2021.

3.1. Preparation for work on the strategy

The work on the strategy was preceded by the "#powiedzPW" survey conducted at the end of 2019 by the Research and Analysis Department of the Innovation and Technology Transfer Management Centre, which was attended by 582 people, representing a group of students and doctoral students, as well as employees (both academic teachers and administrative staff).

According to the results, the most important issues related to the social responsibility are ethical and responsible teaching (76.8%) as well as clear and transparent academic organisation (71%). A large percentage of respondents associate social responsibility with raising qualifications of the academic staff (60.5%), ensuring equal access to education services (59.5%), adapting curricula to the demands of the labour market (53.4%), preserving social attitudes (55.7%) and tolerance (50.5%), while for less than 1/3 of them, the social responsibility is associated with volunteer or charity activity, actions supporting culture, arts, sports, and dialogue with candidates for studies (Parzych et al., 2019).

The results of research carried out as part of the WUT MBA studies (a diploma thesis entitled: "Recommendations for the development of a social responsibility strategy of the Warsaw University of Technology using the guidelines of the PN-ISO 26000:2012 standard and the Declaration of University Social Responsibility") were also very important for developing the strategy.

3.2. Elements of the strategy

The slogan of the strategy is the word 'CARE', around which both the 'promise' and specific strategic goals are defined. The strategy begins with the term Massive Transformative Purpose (MTP) which states: "Solving the problems of the future through elite education and world class research" (WUT, 2021). The strategy also includes a direct reference to the principles of the Declaration of University Social Responsibility, as well as the vision of the university's development. An important part of the document are strategic goals of the Warsaw University of Technology in the area of social responsibility, which include (WUT, 2021):

1. The university that cares about the natural environment.
   - Supporting research that has a positive impact on the natural environment.
   - Implementation of solutions protecting the natural environment in all aspects of the university's functioning.
2. A diverse and committed community.
   - Increasing the university's accessibility to stakeholders (including foreign students and people with special needs).
   - Increasing the involvement and participation in the university community by introducing an efficient flow of information.
   - Building a culture of a socially responsible academic community.
   - Counteracting negative phenomena in the place of work and study.

3. Socially impactful research.
   - Supporting research that has a significant impact on improving the quality of life.
   - Introducing issues related to social responsibility to research areas.
4. Socially responsible graduates.
   - Disseminating the idea of social responsibility in educational programmes.
   - Introducing issues related to professional ethics and sustainable development into curricula.
   - Supporting the development of competences and shaping social attitudes of students and doctoral students.
5. Competent, aware and satisfied employees.
   - Providing conditions for continuous improvement of employees' competences and development.
   - Monitoring and increasing employee satisfaction.
   - Promoting and supporting pro-health attitudes.
   - Cooperation with external stakeholders.
   - Increasing the role of external stakeholders in the life of the university.
   - Integration of graduates with the WUT community.
   - Creating an ecosystem for the development of sustainable entrepreneurship.

It is worth adding that the word "care" in Polish consists of 6 letters and the first letters of the names of the above goals form the acronym "care" (in Polish: "TROSKA").

The goals defined in this way made it possible to determine the directions of activities for the coming years, described also in the strategy. The last element of the strategy are examples of socially responsible activities, in a line with specific goals and strategic directions of activities referred to above.

4. Examples of actions taken under the USR strategy

As a result of the implementation of the aforementioned objectives, a number of activities have been undertaken at WUT, which are also part of the implementation of the sustainable development objectives. Particularly noteworthy is the participation in the ENHANCE consortium, which also includes other leading European technical universities, such as: Technical University of Berlin, RWTH Aachen, Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg, Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, Milan University of Technology and Valencia University of Technology.

The mission of the consortium is to strive for responsible social transformation. The overarching goal of an organization that considers and acts for social responsibility is to maximize its contribution to sustainability. The idea of improving the quality of education directly refers to the fourth SDG (provide quality education for all and promote lifelong learning). The tasks carried out within the consortium refer directly to other goals, e.g.:

- Goal 1: "No poverty", because inequality in access to higher education is a cause of poverty (United Nations, 2014).
- Goal 5: "Gender Equality" (by implementation Gender Equality Plan).
- Goal 9: "Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure" (by building a stable infrastructure, promoting sustainable industrialization, and supporting innovation).

The tasks also contribute to the design of solutions that support the rest, especially environmental, goals.

Among the numerous activities carried out as a part of the consortium, it is worth mentioning the following actions:

- 'Green Campus - ENHANCE summer school on climate change', organised by the WUT between 15th and 28th September 2021. As a part of this summer school, students worked in interdisciplinary groups to develop green campus projects that were presented at the end of the event.
- 'ENHANCE Girls in STEM competition', also organised by the WUT during the Women in Tech Summit in Warsaw in June 2022. The event was organized "for promoting responsible engineering that combines traditional engineering topics with social and environmental issues in close connection with the UN Sustainable Development Goals" (WUT, 2022a). Participation in the competition required developing an innovative solution for the benefit of the local community.
- ENHANCE network of disability officers & diversity and gender equality officers, which aimed at sharing the best practices at the partner universities and associate partners to support students and staff with special needs.

The consortium try to undertake initiatives focusing on supporting people from disadvantaged groups, including those with disabilities, students from less economically developed regions, or students from families where no one has previously completed higher education (the so-called "first - generation students").

Among the numerous actions contributing to sustainable development issues carried out by the Warsaw University of Technology, it is worth mentioning the project 'Social responsibility of science - from promotion to social innovation', which was accepted for funding under the programme of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education 'Social responsibility of science'. The project was implemented within a consortium of two research universities in the Mazovia region, signatories of the Declaration of University Social Responsibility (Warsaw University of Technology and Warsaw University) and two local government units (Warsaw City Hall and

the Marshal's Office of the Mazovian Voivodeship) in Warsaw. The main goal of the project was to popularize scientific achievements (work of scientists, scientific research and development work) and to promote science through the development of awareness and increasing the involvement of individual groups of university stakeholders. One of the interesting activities undertaken in this project were workshops during which participants made attempts to assess the possibility of using their (or planned) research in solving important and complex problems of Mazovia.

The USR strategy initiated changes in the general university's strategy on development, which was approved by the Senate in December 2021. The Development Strategy of the Warsaw University of Technology until 2030 includes a declaration that acting in the sense of social responsibility, the university intends to focus research on spheres related to the greatest civilizational challenges, such as climate threats, environmental pollution, depletion of nonrenewable raw materials, civilization diseases, epidemiological threats or the problem of an aging society, i.e. priorities reflected in the SDGs (WUT, 2022b).

It is worth noting that the university authorities, appreciating the importance of social issues in the proper functioning of the university, referring to its tradition and the achievements of Professor K. Adamiecki made an attempt to modify the ethical structure. A significant action in this area was the appointment of the Rector's Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment and the Rector's Plenipotentiary for Persons with Disabilities. Confirmation of the importance of the idea of social responsibility in the development of the university is also establishing the Office for Social Responsibility of the Warsaw University of Technology. The university has also implemented a Gender Equality Plan and for 5 months it has been conducting the second stage of research related to the perception of equal treatment at the university by its stakeholders.

Summing up the described activities carried out by the Warsaw University of Technology within the adopted strategy of social responsibility, it is worth noting that they are only a small part of a range of initiatives undertaken by the university in this area. The article does not discuss numerous research projects, the results of which may directly contribute to raising the quality of life of the society, especially in the area of environmental protection.

5. Conclusion

The development and implementation of the USR strategy is a confirmation of a mature approach to the responsibility of the university for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment. The strategy takes into account all areas defined in the ISO 26000:2010 standard and needs of all university stakeholders, both external and internal. Undoubtedly, acceptance of this document and its implementation is a confirmation of modern university management according to the needs of the 21st century.

Strategy serves as a plan of action, so it is important to encourage other universities to develop and implement a strategy of social responsibility aimed at supporting the Sustainable Development Goals. Apart from good practices sharing, cooperation between universities, can help them to identify actions which can support all of the SDGs, not only the "Quality Education".

Focusing activities on supporting the Sustainable Development Goals is the duty of universities, especially in the context of the implementation of the so-called "third mission of the university", i.e. "creating mutual relations with the environment, the effect of which is to be the dissemination and popularization of research results and their implementation, including commercialization. The third mission is to serve the greater involvement of academic institutions in the processes of social development at various levels: economic, civilizational, moral, and ethical (Leja, 2015).

The university authorities should "adopt policies and implement strategic actions to address the SDGs. Incorporate all aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals in the university curricula, thus providing students with the knowledge, skills and scientific culture necessary to address the complex challenges of sustainable development throughout their careers" (Diamadopoulos, 2022).

Technical universities have a high potential in real solving important and complex societal problems (through research and developed solutions - social innovations) so they should develop, change and implement educational programs towards a new engineering discipline, (sustainability engineering). Engineering is essential for economic progress and the implementation of new technologies and applications of science, including meeting the basic needs of food, health, housing, roads and transportation, water, energy and the management of the planet's resources (UNESCO, 2019). There are the main reasons for implementing the USR strategy and systematically supporting all the Sustainable Development Goals.

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