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# UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION. CHALLENGES FOR THE TRAINING OF SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE PROFESSIONALS

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## SUMMARY

The study of university social responsibility (USR) shows the link that values-based education has in the training of professionals committed to the needs of society, which includes the challenges of sustainability, the third mission of universities, and responsibility territorial social. The aforementioned means that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must apply educational innovations based on the tensions of

modernity. The objective of this work is to analyze various challenges that higher education presents from the perspective of institutional policies as an articulator of strategies that contribute to the training of socially responsible professionals. In this regard, some values are proposed to articulate efforts that contribute to university management, USR education, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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## Introduction

 University social responsibility (USR) is a dynamic, flexible and integrative management model of wills, needs and interests that involves all educational actors

and compromises the substantive functions of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) through its various areas of impact (Huang and Do, 2021; Acuña-Moraga *et al.*, 2022). Thus, USR transcends the exclusive generation and dissemination of knowledge since it requires the development of concrete actions in

favor of the entire educational community. Likewise, these actions are intended to respond to the requirements of the stakeholders that make up the educational communities (Ali *et al.*, 2021). Also, its approach in the last 10 years has shown great requirement on the part of researchers, academics, and professors

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(Meseguer-Sánchez *et al.*, 2020; Flores-Fernandez *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, this has given rise to the constitution of four conceptual roots, such as the fundamental purpose of universities; corporate social responsibility; campus sustainability; and university-community commitment (Chen and Vanclay, 2021).

The study of USR has motivated the development of policies, models, tools, and methodologies that seek to consolidate a sustainable competitive advantage through plans and programs linked to the substantive functions of HEIs (Larrán and Andrades, 2017; Martí-Noguera and Gaete-Quezada, 2019; Adel *et al.*, 2021). These considerations seek to respond to the new demands underlying the climate crisis, social movements, population increase, population migration, and demands related to diversity and social inclusion (Coelho and Menezes, 2021; Severino-González *et al.*, 2021; Ennes *et al.*, 2021).

All of the above perceptions allow us to define that the USR is a dynamic and consensual management model that contributes to improving the quality of life of people in society since universities are organizations that are protagonists of social transformations (Severino-González *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, these institutions seek the development and care of the population and should be free of discrimination, marginalization, and segregation (Severo *et al.*, 2021).

On the other hand, according to Fanea-Ivanovici and Baber (2022) and Lim (2022), sustainability and social responsibility have a close relationship due to the purposes that they pursue in society. Therefore, it is in this scenario, where sustainability is materialized through various USR policies and strategies that determine the formation of behaviors characterized by a high social and sustainable awareness (Ali *et al.*, 2021; Usak *et al.*, 2021; Carlotto *et al.*, 2022). Indeed, such behavior is fertilized in environments conducive to the development of competencies linked to environmental education and social justice (Kioupi and Voulvoulis, 2019; Alonso *et al.*, 2020; Hurlimann *et al.*, 2021), being important the generation of models based on USR. Thus, in this context, ethical and sustainable management is present, characterized by being transversal, socially responsible, and consciously sustainable (Wided, 2020; Moghadam *et al.*, 2021).

University students are actors who can be professionally trained in community service, which could evidence behaviors whose sustenance is

found in correspondence, prosociality, solidarity, and respect (Ayala-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2019). Hence, this allows promoting through USR the principles of sustainability and social responsibility (García-Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2021). Those that are promoted by supranational networks that seek to respond to the needs of society through training in civic engagement, empathy, and respect (García-Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2021; Vallaey *et al.*, 2022).

Consequently, there are several functions that emanate from the duty to be and duty to be of universities (Sharma and Sharma, 2019; Vallaey and Álvarez, 2019). Henceforth, these materialize the various missions that universities have, such as the first mission established by training; the second mission that fertilizes research, and the third mission that generates social action or university extension (Kiezel *et al.*, 2021; Rubio-Rodríguez and Blandón-López, 2021; Flores-Fernandez *et al.*, 2022). In addition, these functions present links with the attitudes, behaviors, perceptions, preferences, and decisions made by each of the actors that integrate the educational communities (Ayala-Rodríguez *et al.*, 2019; Acuña-Moraga *et al.*, 2022). Besides, in this sense, the decision-making processes of universities should be characterized by sustainable and socially responsible acting, as they could effectively contribute to the installation of values such as empathy, respect, and solidarity (Martí-Noguera *et al.*, 2018; Rababah *et al.*, 2021; García-Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2021). In summary, these values fertilize virtuous circles that generate shared value and well-being for all stakeholders, which respects differences and values human dignity (Ünal and Kaygın, 2020; Sarmiento-Peralta *et al.*, 2021).

According to the research question of this study is: What are the challenges that higher education presents from the perspective of institutional policies as an articulator of strategies that contribute to the training of socially responsible professionals? Concerning the above, the objective of this study is to analyze various challenges that higher education presents from the perspective of institutional policies as an articulator of strategies that contribute to the training of socially responsible professionals.

Lastly, regarding the structure, the research problem is considered, where the importance of this study is evident. Second, the review of the literature is deepened, describing theoretical elements that allow a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study,

considered environmental education. Third, the mission of universities, territorial social responsibility (TSR), and integral education are theorized. Finally, the conclusions include the reflections and considerations of the work.

## Environmental Education and USR

Environmental problems and the behavior of people in society have affected local and global communities (Reid *et al.*, 2021), leading to various ecological crises (Kaukko *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, this has led to various initiatives and the development of prolific social movements. One of those movements is environmental education which seeks to promote good practices based on an environmental ethic in an era defined as anthropocene (Rousell, 2020). All the aforementioned elements raise an integral environmental education that involves diverse values and perspectives, in the search for an increasingly sustainable society (Kang and Hong, 2021). Similarly, this path to sustainability must be addressed by HEIs through their curricula and national and supranational policies. Eventually, these join the efforts and complexities of teachers from multiple areas, such as sciences, social sciences, and political sciences, among others (Sund and Gericke, 2020; Munkebye *et al.*, 2020).

Pro-environmental education requires awareness and sensitization of environmental issues for the installation of ecological lifestyles (Pirchio *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, it is necessary to include in the teaching processes the emotional needs of children, since they express to be concerned about the environment (Baker *et al.*, 2021). The aforementioned makes evident the requirement to incorporate the needs of strategic groups and the challenges of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at all educational levels (Vallaey *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, this contributes to the comprehensive education of future professionals, who can recognize in their decisions and practices their contributions to society by solving problems or meeting specific requirements (Romero-Argueta *et al.*, 2020). After all, it is in this scenario where policies and strategies linked to USR emerge since universities must be able to respond to the shortcomings and demands expressed by society through their substantive functions (Larrán and Andrades, 2017; Zhou *et al.*, 2021).

The multiple global, national, and local problems faced by society have led humanity to implement various policies and strategies. These include

values such as social responsibility, justice, human rights, and global sustainability (Bosio and Schattle, 2023). Also, the aforementioned should motivate the constant search for co-responsibility and collective responsibility in scenarios where the common good is sought because of education for sustainability (Makrakis and Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2021). Therefore, this leads to ecological practices that are evidenced in pro-environmental behaviors (Pirchio *et al.*, 2021). These activities possess relation with empathy, patience, support, respect, self-control, and solidarity (Severino-González *et al.*, 2022a).

That is why the models, policies, and strategies of USR developed by HEIs should include environmental education according to the basic principles of transformative learning. Besides, it is necessary the incorporation of socioemotional competencies (Gómez-Olmedo *et al.*, 2020), giving way to comprehensive training that includes values such as empathy, solidarity, friendship, respect, and compassion (Solís-Espallargas and Barreto-Tovar, 2020; Lochner, 2021). In addition, these values are in harmony with the SDGs (Saari and Mullen, 2020; Romero-Argueta *et al.*, 2020). These are evidenced in research through instruments and tools that seek to demonstrate the importance of the necessary educational innovations surveyed through environmental perceptions and pro-environmental behaviors (Mónus, 2021).

### The SDGs and the Third Mission of Universities

The third mission of universities, also called service to society, university extension, substantive social function, social mission, or social commitment of higher education institutions (Jones *et al.*, 2021; García-Gutiérrez and Corrales-Gaitero, 2021) has been addressed through the strategic planning of HEIs. This has included the SDGs of the UN Agenda 2030 (Martínez-Usarralde *et al.*, 2017; Nardo *et al.*, 2021). Likewise, this has been partially implemented by HEIs. Additionally, this should motivate the mobilization of capacities and resources (Escobar *et al.* 2021) as it is recognized that the SDGs contribute to the growth and prosperity of territories, society, and nature in general (Tetrevova *et al.*, 2021; Rousell, 2020).

On the other hand, according to Jelinkova *et al.* (2021), sustainable development is based on social, environmental, and economic responsibilities (Suryandari *et al.*, 2021; O'Brien *et al.*, 2022). Also, these considerations

endow HEIs with a closer relationship with each stakeholder, especially with the external stakeholders of the educational communities (Chan, 2021). This is given that sustainability strategies based on teaching and learning promote values in young students that raise the desire to contribute to society through professional practice (Severino-González *et al.*, 2019a), because of early involvement in social needs thanks to the implementation of educational policies that include issues present in the social fabric (Kee *et al.*, 2018; Santos *et al.*, 2021; Alm *et al.*, 2022).

Through USR policies and strategies, it is sought to meet the needs of stakeholders and must respond to the characteristics and particularities of the context (Vallaeyes *et al.*, 2022; Severino-González *et al.*, 2022b). Moreover, this situation can be understood through a dynamic model of consensual management (Vallaeyes *et al.*, 2022). This model is supported by challenges that must be consistent with the singularities of the territory and the requirements of the communities (Ruiz-Mora and Cardona-Ramírez, 2020; Severino-González *et al.*, 2022b). Furthermore, this contributes to the third mission of HEIs (Jones *et al.*, 2021), materializing in actions linked to the SDGs, from which pro-environmental attitudes emerge (Bertossi and Marangon, 2022). Thus, to summarize, such attitudes are characterized by empathy and solidarity (Severino-González *et al.*, 2022b). Those contribute to freedom and the development of citizen, caring, respectful, and empathetic behavior (García-Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2021; Sarmiento-Peralta *et al.*, 2021).

According to Leal *et al.* (2021), universities are implementing various policies and strategies that seek to install the SDGs in all substantive functions (Severino-González *et al.*, 2022a; Gómez-Marín *et al.*, 2022). At the same time, these involve hard and systematic work of cooperation, assistance, and solidarity among internal actors and external strategic partners of the educational communities (Petrova *et al.*, 2020). Besides, this teamwork aims to meet the needs of the population through solidarity practices (Coelho and Menezes, 2020). Similarly, it is in this scenario, where situated and contextualized research is fundamental for the construction of relevant solutions according to the lacks and limitations present in society (Symaco and Tee, 2019; Severino-González *et al.*, 2020). Finally, the above is linked to USR and sustainability, materializing through pro-environmental education in correspondence with the SDG goals (Caplow, 2019; Zanellato and

Tiron-Tudor, 2021; Romero-Argueta *et al.*, 2020).

### Territorial Social Responsibility and Integral Education

Territorial social responsibility (TSR) seeks to improve the quality of life of both people, the relationships between them and the organizations of the same territory. That is why it is necessary to respect human dignity (Rusciano *et al.*, 2019; Bataglin and Kruglianskas, 2022; Wiryomartono, 2022). In addition, said term has been linked to actions related to sustainable development, social and economic sustainability, and even education for sustainability and environmental education. Likewise, the above, due to the contributions, generates the values that constitute people's freedoms through the comprehensive understanding of the implications that citizenship possesses. Hence, TSR can respond to new theoretical and practical approaches (Ünal and Kaygın, 2020; Fernández-Pérez and Peña-García, 2021; Kang and Hong, 2021; Liu *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, it is necessary the development of cognitive efforts that contribute to models and tools for value creation according to the new demands of an increasingly complex, uncertain, and dynamic environment (Fulco *et al.*, 2021).

Conversely, according to Gaete-Quezada (2021), TRS implies the understanding of higher education as a public good whose expression is considered a human right that must be protected and promoted by national and international organizations (Sarmiento-Peralta *et al.*, 2021; Bataglin and Kruglianskas, 2022). Thus, in this regard, the construction of socially responsible territories is thanks to the capacity of HEIs to articulate a space where learning, valuing, harmonizing, and transforming with and through the experiences of the inhabitants of the territories themselves (Grimaldo, 2017; Laranja and Pinto, 2022).

TSR can be measured through its economic, environmental, and social impacts (Escobar *et al.*, 2021). For this reason, policies and strategies linked to sustainability and implemented by higher education institutions contribute comprehensively and harmoniously to the growth and prosperity of communities (Voegtlin and Scherer, 2017; Ali *et al.*, 2021). Moreover, this situation should propitiate a student-centered education for awareness and sensitization of the problems present in the social fabric, which fosters empathy, solidarity, respect, dignity, and altruism (Solís-Espallargas and

Barreto-Tovar, 2020; Severino-González *et al.*, 2021).

Additionally, education in values allows a better understanding of the territories and can be developed through testimonial education and environmental education for the development of principles based on social responsibility. Also, this contributes to the sense of citizenship and participation of future professionals (Severino-González *et al.*, 2019b; Kang and Hong, 2021). Subsequently, this could motivate the materialization of practices that seek to meet the needs of the stakeholders that integrate the educational communities. In this respect, it is fundamental the integral education based on values such as empathy and solidarity (Martí-Noguera *et al.*, 2018; Lochner, 2021). In essence, this way, the development of communities is achieved. At the same time, it contributes to the fulfillment of the SDGs (Alm *et al.*, 2022).

## Conclusions

The study of USR and environmental education, as a policy articulator can install socially responsible commitments from the SDGs in HEIs, allows us to indicate that social responsibility from the SDGs should consider the link between USR and environmental education. Likewise, it is essential to determine the implications of the training of socially responsible professionals, characterized by Empathy and solidarity in relation to Respect and Dignity, Freedom and Citizenship, and Environment, which could lead to the definition of new principles and values linked to sustainability and social responsibility.

Therefore, it is in this instance where the socially responsible and sustainable management becomes relevant due to the implications that it has in the context in which they are developed. Consequently, all of which, it is based on the various aspects considered by the USR in terms of the impacts that are generated in correspondence to the substantive functions of HEIs.

The success of the USR strategies is the product of the coherent and consistent implementation of actions linked to the substantive functions of the HEIs. Henceforth, those that are adequately designed through transversal participation, which is sustained through the structure of the universities. On this basis, the involvement of all actors in the educational communities is necessary.

The development of policies and strategies linked to the third

mission of universities contributes to values education, USR, and environmental education as they seek to contribute to society through the installation of challenges related to ethical and socially responsible competencies. Likewise, these can contribute to the welfare and progress of society. Correspondingly, they could be promoted through comprehensive teaching and learning processes where environmental and social awareness and sensitization are installed. Furthermore, they consider empathy and solidarity between people and the environment in general.

It is necessary to know the theoretical implications and practical actions that can be used for the development of an institutional culture based on USR. Regarding limitations of this study, it is the lack of a bibliometric and thematic analysis. In this sense, future research could apply the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), Population, Intervention, Comparison and Outcome (PICO) on socially responsible and ethically pro-environmental policies. Finally, these lead to organizational behaviors and decisions where respect, dignity, freedom, and citizenship prevail.

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## **RESPONSABILIDAD SOCIAL UNIVERSITARIA Y EDUCACIÓN AMBIENTAL. RETOS PARA LA FORMACIÓN DE PROFESIONALES SOCIALMENTE RESPONSABLES**

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### *RESUMEN*

*El estudio de la responsabilidad social universitaria (RSU) muestra el vínculo que tiene la educación basada en valores en la formación de profesionales comprometidos con las necesidades de la sociedad, que incluye los desafíos de la sostenibilidad, la tercera misión de las universidades y la responsabilidad social territorial. Lo anterior significa que las casas de las Instituciones de Educación Superior (IES) deben aplicar innovaciones educativas basadas en las tensiones de la*

*modernidad. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar diversos desafíos que presenta la educación superior desde la perspectiva de las políticas institucionales como articuladora de estrategias que contribuyan a la formación de profesionales socialmente responsables. En este sentido, se proponen algunos valores para articular esfuerzos que contribuyan a la gestión universitaria, la educación en RSU y los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS).*

## **RESPONSABILIDADE SOCIAL UNIVERSITÁRIA E EDUCAÇÃO AMBIENTAL. DESAFIOS PARA A FORMAÇÃO DE PROFISSIONAIS SOCIALMENTE RESPONSÁVEIS**

Pedro Severino-González, Dolores Gallardo-Vázquez, Héctor Saldía-Barahona, Tomy Villanueva-Arequipeño, Giuseppe Sarmiento-Peralta e José de Jesús Romero-Argueta

### *RESUMO*

*O estudo de responsabilidade social universitária (RSU) mostra o vínculo que tem a educação baseada em valores na formação de profissionais comprometidos com as necessidades da sociedade, que incluem os desafios de sustentabilidade, a terceira missão das universidades e a responsabilidade territorial social. O anterior significa que as casas das Instituições de Educação Superior (IES) devem aplicar inovações educativas baseadas nas tensões da modernidade. O objetivo*

*deste trabalho é analisar diversos desafios que apresentam a educação superior desde a perspectiva das políticas institucionais como articuladora de estratégias que contribuem para a formação de profissionais socialmente responsáveis. Nesse sentido, são propostos alguns valores para esforços articulares que contribuem para a gestão universitária, a educação na RSU e os Metas de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (MDS).*