Social Responsibility and Community Engagement at a Hungarian Regional University

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The article highlights that the concept of social responsibility does not only offer possibilities for brand building, but is also the social obligation of universities for the empowerment of their various external communities. After an overview of the current terminology of corporate- and university social responsibility and university community engagement, it presents forms of practice differentiating between USR and community engagement activities using the example of an Eastern-European university of applied sciences. The mainly qualitative data, collected from the content analysis of institutional documents and semi-structured interviews with key members of staff, demonstrate that although the university is a small regional institution, its social responsibility practice is commendable.

Keywords: social responsibility, community engagement, regional university, Central-Eastern Europe

INTRODUCTION

Social responsibility and social engagement should not only be examined in the context of for-profit organizations, but also in that of the individual, civic organizations and public institutions (Nárai & Reisinger, 2016). Similarly to corporate social responsibility (CSR), universities, i.e. any higher education institution, should embrace the commitment to such business practices that voluntarily support the well-being of their micro- or macro-level social environment. The aim of this study, which is the revised edition of 'Social responsibility in higher education: a Hungarian best practice' (Balázs, et. al., 2020), is to call attention to the possibility, and even to the responsibility, of universities to develop socially responsible practices, and differentiates between those of university social responsibility (USR) and university community engagement (UCE). As an illustration, the case of a Hungarian regional university is presented by the analysis of its related practice for the 2015-20 time period.

Our stance is that universities, independent of their size, could develop socially responsible institutional behaviour for the promotion of the manifold sustainability of their external communities while deepening their embeddeddness in local-regional society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Responsibility and Corporate Social Responsibility

The discourse of corporate social responsibility is highly dynamic with its foundations and aspects in constant movement: they get rephrased, confirmed and revised (c.f. Rajcsányi-Molnár & András, 2013). Therefore, it is worth considering what *responsibility* and *social responsibility* for organizations may mean. One interpretation of the former is 'such a requirement as arises from casuality and involves accountability" and 'prevails through accountability to others and its judgement' (Angyal, 2009, p.22). Caroll defines four levels of responsibility for business organizations: economic/financial responsibility (profit generation and job creation), legal responsibility (compliance with the law), ethical responsibility (moral-ethical compliance and trustworthiness) and philanthropic responsibility (voluntary charity and the voluntary promotion of social aims) (Caroll, 1979 in Szlávik, 2009).

The concept of *social responsibility* first appeared in connection with for-profit organizations as corporate social responsibility (CSR), then was related to public sector institutions resulting in such varieties as *university social responsibility* (Nárai & Reisinger, 2016). CSR refer to 'the commitment to such business practices that an organization voluntarily chooses in order to support the well-being of the community and allocate resources to it' (Kotler, 2007, p.11), or 'the business conduct of a company providings allowance and benefits to its employees and stakeholders, including its natural environment, in order to influence their well-being and long-term value in a positive way' (Szlávik, 2009, p.13).

A key principle of CSR is voluntarism (c.f. *corporatively responsible company*, András, et. al., 2013) and it has been shown that responsible business operation is indispensible to increasing competitiveness and improving brand recognition. Kotler highlights five factors of organizational culture for a socially responsible business practice: persuasion (focus on business performance, not PR); commitment to vales; open, sincere and direct communication; consistency and responsibility for credibility (Kotler, 2007). CSR should also be a constantly renewed, proactive, environmentally consious strategy with choosing the social issues best fitting to the business image and brand, then formulating operational practices accordingly. As an example, socially responsible business practices in Hungary can be characterized by sponsorship, philanthropy, charity work by training, environmental protection, green investment, social role formation, employee relation activities, supplier relation activities and legal compliance (Angyal, 2009).

In their meta-analysis of sixty years of CSR discourse, Garriaga and Melé arrange the trends and schools of social responsibility literature into four groups: instrumental, political, integrative and ethical (Garriaga & Melé, 2004; c.f. András & Rajcsányi-Molnár, 2014). The instrumental school of Milton Friedman views CSR as a strategical tool serving economic goals and striving for stock price maximization. If meeting societal needs involves expenses, the company should refuse them. Preferred CSR startegies are philanthropy and marketing activities for a chosen social issue. The political discourse of CSR analyses it in the intersection of the economy, society and power. Companies have increasing influence on local and national political decisions competing with national policy integrity. This trend examines the politically responsible application of economic power and influence with such main concepts as *corporate constitutionality*, the theory of *integrative social contract* and *corporate citizenship*. The integrative approach focuses on the incorporation of social needs and demands into corporate startegies and practice. It argues that the existence, legitimacy and growth of a business organization depends on society, therefore it must react to social problems appropriately. *Problem management, public responsibility, stakeholder management* and *corporate social performance* are some of the main concepts of this school (Friedman, 1970). Finally, ethical trends focus on righteous deeds that help create a better human society. They rely on such ethical, or moral philosophical systems as Kant's capitalism, the modern theories of equitable sharing of ownership and fair distribution, the libertarian freedom-, rights- and approval theories, Aristotelian approaches, Catholic social theory and medieval scholasticism. The *stakeholder normative theory*, the

universal rights theory and the *sustainable development theory* all propagate the service of the mutual benefit of society (Freeman, 1994; Cassel, 2001; Gladwin & Kennelly, 1995).

University Social Responsibility

Social responsibility for public organizations refer to activities that 'they undertake voluntarily over the performance of their operational tasks and the compliance with legal obligations, and by which they benefit others and promote the interests of their community and society' (Nárai & Reisinger, 2016, p.24). Such organizations are aware of the immediate and long-term economic, social and environmental impacts of their operation, are open to the problems of their locality, realize their responsibility for searching for solutions, and take an active part in the shaping of social and environmental issues (Nárai & Reisinger, 2016).

University social responsibility has been defined in various ways. In their meta-analysis of 15 years of journal articles, Jorge and Peña arrive at the conclusion that universities must adopt ethical, societal, employment, social and environmental principles and values in their main activities (management, teaching-learning, research and community engagement), and consider the needs and demands of their various stakeholders when planning and realizing them. This is only possible by interactive dialogue between the partners, considering the effects of institutional operation, and recognizing the need for institutional accountability (Jorge & Peña, 2017; Molnár & Farkas, 2007; Mook, et. al., 2016; Rajcsányi-Molnár, 2019; Vasilescu, et. al., 2010). It is the external and internal effects of the three university missions that make USR visible. Thus a university can be seen as socially responsible if:

- it includes social, ethical and environmental issues into its curricula in order to represent the principle of sustainable development on the highest educational level and make higher education the basis of a more sustainable society;
- it disseminates the results of academic research to society;
- it accepts the codes of good governance, adopts the processes of good governance and accountability, has reporting practices on social and environmental issues, and involves its external stakeholders in decision making;
- it incorporates membership in civic organizations, civic values (e.g. social justice, equity and diversity), education for citizenship and contribution to the social-economic environment into the design of its community engagement activities (Jorge & Peña, 2017).

Another thoughtful definition of USR comes from Vallaeys who says that it is 'the model of a university anchored in its territory, open to dialogue, concerned about its local and global social and environmental impacts and active in promoting democratically produced science as a public and non-commodified good. USR encourages ongoing self-reflection by the academic community regarding epistemic horizons and the repercussions of its task. A „green" university cares for its people and environment, aspires to worlwide academic diversity, rejects monopolies and the standardization of knowledge production, and encourages sustainable and equitable learning and research in communities of knowledge.' He concludes that 'there is no indication that its contribution to the universal cognititve and spiritual progress of humanity might be less than that of the model that holds science and knowledge to be commercial goods' (Vallaeys, 2014, p.96).

In the Hungarian literature Bodorkós (2010), Kerekes (2013), Rechnitzer and Reisinger (2015), and Reisinger and Dános (2015) have written extensively about university social responsibility. The latter also emphasize that USR must be present in all the three university functions. In the education function by the incorporation of the topics of sustainable development and social inclusion into university curricula; by the formation of green and socially sensitive attitudes; by scholarships and student support schemes that promote equity; by the foundation of special colleges; by offering student support services (e.g. mentoring) and courses on minority languages and cultures; and by the inclusion of civic organization activities into coursework (Reisinger & Dános, 2015).

Similarly, there are various ways the research function may support a university's socially responsible strategy (Bodorkós, 2010; Kerekes, 2013; Reisinger & Dános, 2015):

- by research projects in partnership with various social actors (e.g. participatory action research about the social competencies students may develop during their community service)
- by networking at conferences (the academic staff and civic organizations)
- by university research about local social problems
- by research about sustainable development (Kővári, 2019; Vukmirovic, et. al., 2018; Kumargazhanova, et. al., 2018), and social equality and equity
- by the incorporation of their results into university strategy.

As for the third mission, the principles of USR may appear via the voluntary work and civic organization membership of teachers, students and university employees; in the observance of equal opportunities in university employment; in the networking and various cooperation activities with cultural and sport organizations; in the series of talks for the local community on various contemporary issues; in the strategic inclusion of the principle of sustainable development, and in the development of a sustainable campus (Reisinger & Dános, 2015).

The realization of the three university functions in such ways may be beneficial not only for the local-regional community, but also for the higher education institution itself. For example, in terms of competence development in teaching, research and learning; science popularization; an increase in social capital; the development of the university's social network, and a growth in local trust. Also, specific local and regional social issues may be revealed and research results may get more appreciated, while the principles of volunteering and sustainable development may be propagated (Rechnitzer & Reisinger, 2015).

University Community Enagagement and University Social Responsibility

The gradual extension of university missions, i.e. those functions that its founders, supervising bodies and society have ever expected of tertiary education institutions (Benneworth, et. al, 2018; Scott, 2006), has raised university extramural activities to the strategic level since the 1980's. The third function may be a useful tool for demonstrating direct institutional commitment to the development of local-regional society (Benneworth, et. al., 2018; Goddard, 2018; Hrubos, 2013; Jongbloed, et. al., 2008; Maassen, et. al., 2019; Reichert, 2019), which the *Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education* (EC, 2017) and the latest higher educational strategy of the European Union also promote (OECD/EU, 2017). They see *community engagement* as the preferable mechanism for university contribution to societal development. Although the concept is a well-embedded cathegory in American higher education, in Europe it has received major attention only since the 2010's with its most current definition being 'a process whereby universities engage with community stakeholders to undertake joint activities that can be mutually beneficial even if each side benefits in a different way' (Benneworth, et. al., 2018, p.17). As being two closely related concepts, their differentiation may be worthwhile for our research.

As seen above, some understand university social responsibility as an overriding principle and examine its realization in the various university functions (Jorge & Peña, 2017; Reisinger & Dános, 2015). Others interpret it on the basis of the expansion of university stakeholder relations (Jongbloed, et. al., 2008), which is demonstrated by the Quadruple and Quintuple Helix Models (Reisinger & Dános, 2015) and is considered as a special area of third mission activities (Benneworth, et. al., 2018). The third mission, which can basically be understood as for-profit knowledge transfer and non-profit community engagement (Benneworth, et. al., 2018, Maassen, et. al., 2019), is meant to actively promote the economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being of the local and regional (and even national and international) stakeholders of universities. University community engagement practice is rooted in local societal, social, ethical and environmental issues which universities commit themselves to. Therefore, the area of community engagement may overlap with the concept of *university social responsibility* based on the similar, or even identical nature of their aims, target audience and forms of realization. However, there is a fundamental difference between the two terms: while USR refers to top-down, transactional activities initiated by the university towards certain groups of the local community (Bowen, et. al., 2010), community engagement activities are based on equal partnerships and the common design, planning and realization of mutually beneficial activities (Benneworth, et. al., 2018; Jongbloed, et. al., 2008; Himmelman, 2001). The

nature of university-stakeholder relations in these collaborations may range from transactional to transformative partnerships (Bowen, et. al., 2010, Benneworth, et. al., 2018), while the depth of authenticity of the activities from volunteering to a holistic civic engagement of the entire institution (Hazelkorn, 2016, Benneworth, et. al., 2018).

METHOD

The research presented here is part of a comparative case study of three Eastern-European regional universities exploring their contribution to the complex societal development of their town and area. The University of Dunaújváros (UoD), Hungary was chosen to map and analyse its present social engagement practice in terms of university social responsibility and university community engagement. Being a small, regional university with a modest market share and moderate resources, the case highlights the exploitability of the ever prevailing possibilities for contributing to the public good (Hazelkorn & Gibson, 2018).

The mainly qualitative data was collected by using content analysis on relevant institutional documents (university strategy, reports, official news releases on the university's website and social media platforms), relying on previous research (Sitku, 2019, 2020; Balázs, et. al., 2020) and conducting semi-structured interviews with key academic actors (the rector, teachers, administrative staff). After mapping the activities between 2015 and 2020, we have selected the annually recurring, or special ones and cathegorized them as either USR or UCE activities based on the conceptual framework presented above with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding for the upcoming renewal of the university's mid-term strategy.

RESULTS

As discussed earlier, similarly to CSR, universities should embrace the commitment to such business practices that voluntarily support the well-being of their micro- or macro-level social environment and allocate resources to them. The University of Dunaújváros is a small regional university of applied sciences focusing on IT, mechanical engineering and business studies. To increase its embeddeddness into the local community and regional society, it has an extended community engagement and social responsibility practice for the citizens of its town and area. The university continuously works for the strengthening of its social, economic, scientific and cultural relations with local, regional, national and international stakeholder groups and has placed social responsibility and the third mission in a strategic position. Although located in the country and small in size, the USR and community engagement practice of the university on the local and regional level is commendable in Hungary.

UoD has a tradition of organizing a wide range of activities and events in the scope of social responsibility for the local-regional community. Besides its several USR initiatives, it has a wide range of community engagement activities. The activities relevant for the concept of university social responsibility are:

- *Researchers' Night* (Science Open Day)
- *Everyone's University* (lecture series for senior citizens)
- *UoD Entrance Examination Preparation Programme* (access programme in STEM subjects and EFL)
- Various charitable initiatives (fund-raising, marketing campaign for charitable causes, open campus resources)
- *DuFiókák* nursery (for childern of staff and students)
- *Family-friendly workplace* policy (responsible employer practices)

The institutionalized community engagement activities are:
- Town and area employment and economic cooperation events (e.g. Career Fair, Vocational Day, regional employment strategy, series of trainings)

- *European Mobility Week* (various events for awareness raising and knowledge dissemination about electromobility and environmental sustainability)
- *DUDIK Festival* (annual national music festival organized by the Student Union)
- *Science Week* (conferences, exhibitions, activities for knowledge dissemination on actual scientific topics)
- Charitable initiatives and events in collaboration with various external partners:
  - *'Több lett? Maradhat!'* (food collection)
  - *#trashchallenge* (garbage collection)
  - *Hollywoodi Gólyabál* (a fundraiser ball for freshmen)
  - *'Cipősdoboz Akció'* (toy and stationary collection)
  - *XVII. Carissa Kupa* (a national futsal cup)
  - blood donation
  - screening (local Catholic Church renovation project)
  - traffic safety competition for schoolchildren
  - *Szuperkupa Döntő* (football finals)
  - *Charitable Footrace*
  - *Charitable Ball* (for the local hospital)
- *Integrated Vocational Education Centre Project* (a complex collaboration programme for the popularization and capacity-building of careers in STEM fields with the local and regional high schools)

The detailed description of these events can be found in previous publications (Sitku, 2019; Balázs, et. al., 2020), therefore here we only highlight one flagship activity for the university's USR and CE practice each. These can be seen as national good practices and might deserve international attention.

For USR our example is *DUFiókák*, the university nursery, which is part of the university's *family-friendly workplace* policy. There are five nurseries for altogether 356 children in Dunaújváros, rather inadequate for meeting the demand for the daycare provision of young children of the town and its area. Day nurseries are indispensable for parents to return to work, therefore the university runs its own nursery school called *DUFiókák* to support its employees and part-time students. This means that those children aged 1-3 who have a parent who is an employee or student of the University of Dunaújváros and would like to return to work from maternity leave are eligible for a place at DuFiókák Nursery School. The aim of the university is to support its employees and students to reconcile their family, private and work responsibilities. The nursery provides high quality educational, childcare, catering and hygienic services appropriate for the needs of children aged between 1 and 3 years. Its motto is 'children belong to their families and the best place for them is in the family'. Therefore the management and teachers of the nursery seek to build a reliable cooperation with parents and families. They allow for and respect the specific value system of each family and the personality of the children, and organize several family programmes throughout the year. In their educational programme DuFiókák Nursery School focuses on healthy lifestyle and the promotion of the love of music making rhythm, singing and songs part of everyday educational work and playtime.

The nursery has a significant place in the university's social responsibility practice, and, as the number of enrolled children shows, in the life of the town and the region. For example, in the 2018-19 academic year it took care of 14 children, the maximum of its capacity (DUFiókák Group 1: 8 children of 6 UoD employees and 2 students; DUFiókák Group 2: 5 children of 2 UoD employees and 3 students). This trend continues into the 2019-20 year when the nursery has 13 children for permanent and 1 child for temporary daycare (Group 1: 7 children of 6 employees and 1 student, Group 2: 6 children of 6 employees).

As an example of community engagement, as described by Benneworth et al. (2018), is a collaboration between the university, the local high-schools and local-regional employers through a complex student career path to provide the skilled workforce needed in the region. Prompted by the mayor of the city, it contains the *Integrated Vocational Education Project* (IVEP, from 2015 on), an access programme in the STEM subjects and EFL (*DUE FFP*, from 2018 on), and *Dual Study Programmes* (DSP, from 2015 on).

High-school students in vocational education are offered a comprehensive student career and support programme, which leads to participation in the university and its industrial partners' *dual study programmes*, then local, or regional employment (rather than leaving the region for a job opportunity elsewhere). The first stage is provided by the complex educational cluster with *the Dunaújváros Integrated Vocational Education Centre* (*DSZC*), the local grammar school and *Magyar László Gimnázium* in nearby Dunaföldvár. It is a versatile and highly active cooperation whose range and level of collaboration is of model value in the country. All university institutes, much of its infrastructure and even the campus site are involved in it. In order to enhance interest in STEM studies and careers, students are offered regular programmes, like experimental lessons in Physics, extracurricular courses in IT and robotics, science popularizing lectures and study trips. Local and national competitions are organized in Autocad, Mathematics, English and the natural sciences, secondary students take part in the university's talent promotion programmes, free supplementary courses in Physics and Mathematics are offered in preparation for the national school leaving exam and higher education entry, and there is an *International Club* to improve students' proficiency in English. Moreover, institutional cooperation on the level of teachers and logistics is provided by the various CPD trainings and counselling of the university's Teacher Training Centre together with a shared use of university workshops and rooms.

To support these qualitative data with some quantitative metrics, here are some of the outcomes of this complex programme:

- International Club: Organized since the 2016-17 school year, three times in a semester, UoD students (30%) and DSZC high-school students (70%), voluntary participation (UoD students),or organized as part of their EFL training (DSZC students), 25-35 students/occasion, 2-3 presentations/occasion (70% international students of UoD, 30% DSZC high-school students), 52 presentations since 2016.
- Physics Experiment Workshops: 1-2 occasions/semester, 6-8 lessons/occasion, 30-40 high-school students at each occasion. Number of partner institutions: 3.
- STEM popularizing lectures: 3-4 lectures a year, 45-90 minutes/occasion, 20-30 students/occasion.
- Study Trips: once a year, the 5 DSZC high-schools, 20 high-school students/occasion.
- Competitions: local, regional and national high-school competitions in Maths, Physics, Chemistry, English, Autocad; total number of students since 2015: 120 students.
- High-School Leaving Exam Preparation in Physics: once a year, 5-10 students from the local-regional secondary schools, 60/120 lessons a year.
- Maths and IT High-School Leaving Exam Preparation courses: once a year, 5-15 students at each, 60 lessons/year.
- CPD trainings: for the high-school teachers of IVEP, four 30-lesson trainings in June 2015 for 10-15 people each for 30 credits on these topics: research methodology and the basics of digital data processing, alternative conflict management methods in schools, developing e-learning competencies, and mentoring support for interns by problem-based learning.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Our results highlight that most of the social responsibility practice of the University of Dunaújváros is realized as community engagement activities: they involve a variety of practices carried out in collaboration with a wide range of partners and on the annual basis, which may indicate the deepening of partnerships and the institutionalization of these activities. Although the university cherishes fewer kinds of USR activities, they significantly contribute to its local embeddeddness due to their social, educational and cultural importance for the local-rgional society. Therefore, we suggest the maintenence and further development of both kinds of practices in the upcoming review of university strategy.

The scope and range of the presented activities over the years may raise the question of their sustainability. Its challenges for the university is discussed by Sitku (2019), our aim here was to demonstrate

that sustained socially responsible institutional behaviour is not necessarily dependent on university type, i.e. its location, profile and size. We believe that regardless of economic and institutional limitations, universities are always offered *some* possibility for contributing to the solution of local challenges that may be realized either in a selfless and voluntary way, or in mutually beneficial collaborations with external partners. Their exploitation for community and institutional development, however, is the responsibility of the higher education institution.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Mapping and understanding present institutional practice is only the first step towards developing meaningful ways with deepening authenticity for university community engagement or social responsibility activities. The application of the upcoming European state-of-the-art institutional self-assessment tool, the TEFCE Framework (*Towards a European Framework for Community Engagement*, Benneworth et al., 2018; Farnell & Šćukanec, 2018; Farnell, 2020) will not only facilitate deeper institutional and stakeholder understanding of existing practices, but also present ways of further development for both the university and its stakeholders. As such, it may be a treasure chest for future research on the practice of university social responsibility and community engagement for the sustainability of local-regional communities.

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