

University Social Responsibility: A Comparative Analysis From The Point Of View Of Stakeholders

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Summary

The purpose of this article is to present a comparative analysis of the Business Administration Programs of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in the city of Cartagena, Colombia, and Northwestern State University of Louisiana (NSU) in the United States within the framework of university social responsibility. This article is the product of a descriptive-comparative research, which studied a non-probabilistic convenience sample of 340 people, made up of the groups of interest: students (278), and teachers (62). The data collection techniques were conducted through surveys applied to the stakeholders identified for this research. The results show that the HEIs in Cartagena and the NSU are perceived by their stakeholders as having good practices framed in social responsibility policies. However, at NSU there is a greater

awareness and appropriation of aspects that underpin the University Social Responsibility.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutions, HEI, social responsibility, Management, Impacts, University Social Responsibility, Stakeholders.

Introduction

Modern society today faces great challenges such as the degradation of ecosystems, extreme poverty, food security, energy transition, corruption, among other social and economic problems. This requires public and private policies that promote actions focused on mitigating the challenges mentioned above; in this sense, trained and competent professionals in these areas become a fundamental piece to guide efforts towards durable and sustainable management in companies. In this context, universities have the moral duty to investigate and deepen on the above aspects in such a way that it can contribute to the development and welfare of their immediate environment and society in general; from this perspective, the university must increasingly strive to ensure that its graduates are not only competent professionals, but also conscious and responsible citizens who play a key role in the responsible development of more sustainable and durable regions and communities (OECD, 2011; Cardona, 2023).

In this order of ideas, the position assumed by the university and its practices on its campuses can influence the way society perceives itself based on the social and economic challenges that it manages to raise and that become topics of debate and discussion. For this reason, it is important to establish a framework of action for the fulfillment of its substantive functions through an approach centered on social commitment. This implies recognizing and promoting its humanistic nature, as well as seeking a more active interaction with its environment. It also implies offering an education of excellence, pertinent, and aware of its responsibility that leads to a sustainable and durable development in society.

For this reason, universities, and higher education institutions (HEIs) are committed to train professionals devoted to sustainability and social justice. However, universities often suffer from economic pressures, as well as organizational problems, which associated with the demands of the official entities that regulate education such as quality policies and accreditation processes, as well as the pressure to comply with national and international performance indicators, often generate dilemmas for the leaders of higher education institutions, since they must balance the achievement of these objectives with the fulfillment of the university's mission.

In this context, university social responsibility (USR) emerges as an alternative whose purpose is to re-signify and give visibility to the commitment of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) with fundamental aspects such as innovation management with social purpose, sustainable human development, ethical management, education with excellence and relevance, factors that revolve around the organizational, cognitive and social impacts that the university has; whether in Colombia or in the United States or any other nation, HEI must assume commitments with the aspects mentioned above. In the particular case of the Colombian Caribbean region, HEIs have aspects to work on, such as poor quality and a disorganized increase of higher education programs, low percentages of the population in the educational system compared to the country as a whole, restricted access to financing and a weak connection with the productive sectors that demand labor (Porporato and Samuels, 2023; Meikle and Morris, 2022; Chen and Vanclay, 2022; Jain, et al., 2022).

Therefore, it is essential to emphasize that the implementation of University Social Responsibility (USR) is part of the strategic direction of universities, and depends largely on the institutional commitment, considering that the university acts by social mandate. Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that the actions of HEIs allow the creation of welfare in their immediate context. Likewise, USR should be considered as the best alternative to strengthen academic relevance and legitimacy. Finally, the USR perspective should strengthen the social mission of HEIs and facilitate the formulation of policies

that promote the sustainable development of society (Romero, González, and Cardona, 2022).

Based on the above, the purpose of this article is to conduct a comparative analysis of university social responsibility between universities in the city of Cartagena and the Northwestern State University of Louisiana (NSU). With this vision of USR (organizational, educational, cognitive, and social), we seek to address the challenges mentioned above, considering both the positive and negative impacts generated by HEIs. It is important to emphasize that this reflection cannot be separated from public educational policy, especially from the quality requirements established by the official entities that regulate education in HEIs. In this context, the study examined four higher education institutions in Cartagena, Colombia, and one institution of higher education in the State of Louisiana in the United States, which offer business administration and/or related programs.

Theoretical framework

University social responsibility (USR) refers to the commitment made by higher education institutions in relation to the social and environmental demands of their surrounding communities. This commitment arises mainly from the concept of sustainable development introduced in the Brundtland report (1987), and the World Commission on Environment and Development, of the United Nations General Assembly of 1983 (Aguado, 2018), which laid the foundations of this concept by presenting a vision of sustainable development as a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, technological evolution, and institutions are aligned around a sustainable development of society.

Since then, different perspectives of the social responsibility of the university have been constructed, which allow us to understand that this phenomenon is not easy to describe due to the complexity it involves. On the one hand, it involves the generation and communication of knowledge, the training of competent professionals and the education of outstanding individuals who contribute to the welfare of society. In this sense, the social responsibility of the university goes beyond that of other organizations, encompassing all times, modalities, and

contexts (2017; Palacios, 2022; Alcántara, et al. 2022; Moghadam, et al. 2021).

In the same sense, university social responsibility implies that the IES are turned into engines of the social, economic, and environmental betterment of its surroundings. Also, the universities must turn their faculties into sustainable campuses, and promote sustainable practices that could inspire the educational community. In other words, the USR implies that the universities go further than their educational function and promote a generation of shared values upon their different interested parties. That is, the IES must perform a critical and reflexive role on society. The USR could be linked to different constructed theories, such as social management, impact management, the implications with the stakeholders, and the management of the university's fundamental rolls. (Hsieh, et al. 2019; Sousa, et al. 2021; Karwowska, 2021; Chen y Vanclay, 2021; Barnett y Guzmán, 2022; Huang, et al., 2021).

Therefore, universities that seek to have a socially responsible management involve academic programs, curricula, and program content, to ensure the comprehensive training of professionals with social sensitivity. Likewise, they must promote the generation of knowledge and innovative solutions to social problems from their research centers, and with the active participation of students in projects and activities that aim to have an impact on all social spheres. To achieve this, the commitment of university authorities is required, who, from the strategic direction, and institutional educational projects, along with effective leadership, must declare the university's commitment to the solution of social problems (Belando and Temiño, 2020; Sengupta, et al. 2020; Florentina, et al. 2013; Ankit and Tharwat, 2020; Kouatli, 2019; Terán and Torres, 2020; Goldbach, et al. 2022; Ismail, 2020; Agustina, et al. 2023).

Based on the above, this research assumed the understanding of USR from the perspective of François Vallaëys (2009), who describes the categories to be managed in a university to be socially responsible; the remarkable thing about this approach is that it involves the educational and the moral aspects, the stakeholders, and the substantive functions. This author

summarizes them in four impacts: organizational, educational, cognitive, and social. First, the organizational impact examines the welfare policies for administrative, faculty and students; the environmental management, the accountability, the good governance, the transparency, and the relations with stakeholders (Vallaey, De la Cruz and Sasia, 2009; Reichel, et al. 2023; El-Kassar, et al. 2023; Godonoga and Sporn, 2022; Muñoz and Ramos, 2022; Do and Huang, 2023; Ali, et al. 2021).

Second, the educational impact is related to the teaching, administration, and pedagogy of the university; its main impact is the formation of ethical and socially sensitive professionals. Third, the cognitive impact refers to how HEIs are linked to the STI ecosystem, articulating science with communities, making possible the management, appropriation, and democratic distribution of the benefits of scientific activity. Finally, social impacts are linked to social and economic welfare; that is, the university generates social mobility and social projection, exercising its key role in the solution of social problems (Díaz, et al. 2018, Palad, et al. 2023; Kolodiziev, et al. 2023; Šimić, et al. 2022; Flores, 2022, Cardona, 2022).

In that order, Vallaey (2014) argues that the concept of university social responsibility and its impacts in Latin America emerged in the early 2000s supported by the work of the Chilean network "Universidad Construye País" and the Latin American network of universities called "Inter-American Initiative of Ethics, Social Capital and Development", supported by the Norwegian government through the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). From these efforts, as Vallaey (2014) points out, the concept of the socially responsible university is consolidated based on the management of the four impacts as illustrated below in Figure 1.

Fig. 1. University's impact management, according to Vallaey (2009).



Source: Own from Vallaeyes et al. (2009).

Methodology

The present study is derived from a multiple case study, its approach is descriptive-comparative, whose objective was to analyze the university practices in the framework of university social responsibility developed in the business administration programs located in the city of Cartagena-Colombia (Fundación Universitario Tecnológico Comfenalco, Universidad Libre, Universidad de Cartagena, and the Universidad del Sinú Seccional Cartagena) and the Northwestern State University of Louisiana located in the United States. A non-probabilistic convenience sample of 340 people was studied, made up of the groups of interest: students (278) and teachers (62). The data collection techniques were conducted through surveys applied to the stakeholders (students and teachers). For the comparative analysis was supported by data from the work of HEIs in Cartagena from (Romero, González, and Cardona, 2022), the questionnaire was constructed from the work developed by (Romero, 2017) and the theoretical proposal on University Social Responsibility by (Valley, 2009) which has as object of analysis the organizational, social, cognitive, and educational impacts of the University on society. The SPSS statistical program was used for data processing.

Results

It is important to highlight that, based on the documentary analysis of the policies of the universities included in this study, these institutions have several aspects in common, but they also have their particularities. First, the universities located in the city

of Cartagena have three main aspects in common: first, an interest in socially responsible management, evidenced in their educational proposals and the exercise of their substantive functions; second, that they serve middle and low-income populations; and third, that most of their income is generated by tuition.

On the other hand, Northwestern State University is in Natchitoches in the state of Louisiana, in the United States. It shares with the IES of Cartagena the interest for a socially responsible management, which is identified from its mission where it declares its intention to be an institution that contributes from the educational aspect to inclusion, and to the improvement of its region, the state, and the nation. Finally, it should be noted that it is a public institution, belonging to the university network of its state, and has a more robust infrastructure and budget.

The following is the analysis resulting from the processing of the findings obtained from the application of the data collection instrument: organizational, social, and cognitive impacts on the Business Administration programs in the universities mentioned in the methodological aspect of this research.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of organizational impact: human rights, gender equity and non-discrimination (Cartagena HEIs and NSU).

Institutions	Indicator	T. Dis	Dis	Ind.	Agree	T. Agree
Cartagena	I consider that in the university there is no discrimination towards Gender	12%	7%	11%	36%	34%
NSU		0%	0%	13%	59%	28%
Cartagena	I consider that in the university there is no discrimination towards Race	11%	9%	13%	30%	37%
NSU		0%	3%	3%	56%	38%
Cartagena	I consider that in the university there is no discrimination towards Age	9%	8%	12%	36%	35%
NSU		0%	0%	13%	44%	44%
Cartagena	I consider that in the university there is no discrimination towards Socioeconomic level	11%	11%	17%	31%	30%
NSU		0%	0%	3%	59%	38%
Cartagena	I consider that in the university there is no discrimination towards Political trend	22%	11%	19%	30%	18%
NSU		0%	0%	9%	28%	59%

Cartagena	I consider that in the university there is no discrimination towards Beliefs or religion	12%	8%	15%	32%	33%
NSU		0%	0%	6%	34%	59%
Cartagena	I consider that in the university there is no discrimination towards Sexual orientation	13%	11%	13%	32%	31%
NSU		0%	0%	6%	41%	53%

Source: Own elaboration.

In relation to table one, regarding the part of the survey that inquired about human rights, gender equity and non-discrimination. In the universities studied in Cartagena, 36% of the participants in the study indicated that they agreed; likewise, in the NSU, 59% of the participants in the study indicated that they agreed that there is no gender discrimination. In addition, in the universities studied in Cartagena, 30% of the participants in the study indicated that they agreed; in NSU, 56% of the participants in the study indicated that they agreed that there was no discrimination based on race. Similarly, in the universities studied in Cartagena, 36% of the participants in the study indicated that they agreed; in NSU, 44% of the participants in the study indicated that they agreed that there was no discrimination based on age. Very similarly, in the universities studied in Cartagena, 31% of the participants in the study indicated that they agreed; at NSU, 59% of the participants in the study indicated that they agreed that there is no discrimination based on socioeconomic level.

In this same dimension, but with respect to political affiliation, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation. In the universities studied in Cartagena, 30% of the participants in the study indicated that they agreed; in the NSU, 59% of the participants in the study indicated that they totally agreed that there is no discrimination based on political tendency. In the universities studied in Cartagena, 33% of the participants in the study indicated that they were in total agreement; at NSU, 59% of the participants in the study indicated that they were in total agreement that there was no discrimination based on beliefs or religion. 32% of the participants in the study from the universities studied in Cartagena, said they agreed; likewise, at NSU, 53% of the participants in the study indicated that they strongly agreed that there is no discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of administrative and organizational aspects (Cartagena HEIs and NSU).

Institutions	Indicator	T. Dis	Dis	Ind.	Agree	T. Agree
Cartagena	At the university there are actions aimed at the integral development of teachers and students	3%	7%	35%	43%	12%
NSU		0%	0%	13%	38%	50%
Cartagena	I believe that the university officials have been elected in the form transparent	10%	16%	29%	30%	15%
NSU		0%	0%	6%	72%	22%
Cartagena	I believe that the university officials have been elected in the form democratic	10%	11%	27%	33%	19%
NSU		0%	0%	9%	34%	56%
Cartagena	I note that in the university interpersonal relationships are generally respectful	6%	13%	17%	47%	17%
NSU		0%	0%	9%	56%	34%
Cartagena	The university takes actions to protect the environment in its facilities	18%	19%	21%	33%	9%
NSU		0%	0%	3%	44%	53%
Cartagena	University in its marketing campaigns promotes human values	6%	9%	26%	37%	22%
NSU		0%	0%	0%	59%	0%

Source: Own elaboration.

In relation to administrative and organizational factors. When asked if the university has actions aimed at the integral development of professors and students, 43% of the participants from the universities studied in Cartagena indicated that they agreed; in the NSU, 59% of the participants in the study indicated that they were in total agreement. When asked if they believe that university officials have been elected in a transparent manner, in the universities studied in Cartagena 30% of the participants in the study said they agreed; at NSU 72% of the participants in the study indicated that they agreed. Regarding the question "Do you believe that university officials have been democratically elected?", 33% of the participants in the universities studied in Cartagena said they agreed; at the NSU, 56% of the participants in the study indicated that they were in total agreement.

Similarly, in response to the question "Are interpersonal relationships at the university generally respectful?", 47% of the participants in the study from the universities studied in Cartagena indicated that they agreed; similarly, at NSU, 56% of

the participants in the study indicated that they agreed. When asked if the university takes measures to protect the environment in its facilities, 33% of the participants in the universities studied in Cartagena said they agreed; at NSU, 53% of the participants in the study said they were in complete agreement. When asked if the university promotes human values in its marketing campaigns, regarding the question whether they believe that university officials have been democratically elected, in the Cartagena universities studied 37% of the study participants stated that they agreed; similarly, at NSU 59% of the study participants indicated that they agreed.

Table 3. Comparative analysis of cognitive impact: Dissemination and transfer of knowledge (Cartagena HIEs and NSU).

Institutions	Indicator	T. Dis	Dis	Ind.	Agree	T. Agree
Cartagena	At the university, research is conducted on social problems	3%	5%	33%	43%	16%
NSU		0%	0%	16%	34%	50%
Cartagena	The university organizes community-facing forums and activities in relation to social problems	8%	10%	33%	36%	13%
NSU		0%	0%	13%	59%	28%
Cartagena	The university organizes community-facing forums and activities in relation to environmental problems	9%	12%	35%	33%	11%
NSU		0%	0%	19%	34%	44%

Source: Own elaboration.

Considering the cognitive impact, from what could be noted from table 3, when asked if in universities there is research conducted on social problems, 43% of participants from universities studied in Cartagena indicated to be in agreement, while 50% of NSU's participants pointed to be in total agreement. As far as universities organizing community-facing forums and activities in relation to social problems, 36% of participants from universities studied in Cartagena, and 59% of NSU's participants indicated that they agree. When facing the question if universities organize community-facing forums and activities in relation to environmental problem, 33% of participants from universities studied in Cartagena answered to agree, while 44% of NSU's participants responded that they totally agree.

Table 4. Comparative analysis of social impact (Cartagena HIEs and NSU).

Institutions	Indicator	T. Dis	Dis	Ind.	Agree	T. Agree
Cartagena	University's professors link their teachings to the social problems	9%	11%	32%	35%	13%
NSU		0%	0%	22%	47%	31%
Cartagena	University's professors link their teachings to the environmental problems	9%	12%	35%	33%	11%
NSU		0%	0%	9%	50%	41%
Cartagena	I sense that the university maintains close contact with key actors of social development.	5%	10%	47%	28%	11%
NSU		0%	0%	6%	41%	53%
Cartagena	There is participation of the University in the least favored communities through programs or plans	6%	13%	46%	27%	8%
NSU		0%	0%	16%	34%	50%
Cartagena	The subjects present in the curriculum of the programs offered by the university give the opportunity to participate in social projects.	1%	6%	23%	45%	25%
NSU		0%	0%	28%	47%	25%

Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding social impact, when asked if university professors link their teaching to social problems, in the universities studied in Cartagena, 35% of the participants in the study indicated that they agreed; on the other hand, at NSU, 47% of the participants in the study indicated that they agreed. When asked if university professors link their teaching to environmental problems, 33% of the participants from the universities studied in Cartagena said they agreed; at NSU, 50% of the participants in the study said they agreed. Then, when asked if the university maintains close contact with key actors of social development, 47% of the participants from the universities studied in Cartagena were indifferent; in contrast, in the NSU 53% of the participants in the study indicated that they were in total agreement.

In addition, when asked if the University participates in the less favored communities through programs or plans, 46% of the participants from universities in Cartagena were indifferent; in turn, at NSU, 50% of the participants in the study indicated that they were in total agreement. Finally, when asked if the subjects

in the curriculum of the programs offered by the university provide the opportunity to participate in social projects, 45% of the participants from the universities in Cartagena said they agreed; likewise, at the NSU, 47% of the participants in the study said they agreed.

Conclusions

To conclude, according to the results obtained from the academic programs of business administration of the HEIs located in the city of Cartagena-Colombia studied, as well as in the business administration program of NSU in the state of Louisiana in the United States, programs, and actions consistent with the concept of university social responsibility are identified.

According to the comparative analysis, the organizational impact, which is one of the analyzed dimensions of the study, the perception of the stakeholders for the practices developed by the HEIs studied regarding human rights, gender equity and non-discrimination are highly positive, i.e., there is a broad consent for the policies developed. Likewise, related to the administrative and organizational aspects studied, the stakeholders confirm a positive perception of a good organizational working environment, i.e., good working atmosphere, transparency in the processes and participation and democracy in the university bodies, as well as good practices in the management of responsible marketing.

With respect to cognitive impact, another of the dimensions analyzed, the perception of stakeholders is that there is an adequate performance in the development of research projects around social problems, and forums are developed that target community actors, and that focus on social and environmental issues.

Regarding social impact, it is clear that the programs analyzed show a great social commitment and a great responsibility in terms of training, research and social projection; however, in the HEIs studied in Cartagena, there are gaps to be filled in order to achieve a greater positive impact in management, and the promotion of environmental awareness, and the linkage with social development actors, so that they can participate more

actively in the design and implementation of social projects linked to the curriculum.

For its part, the NSU shows a high performance in all dimensions and indicators of socially responsible university management. Finally, there is an aspect that was a constant throughout the study, the great majority of the indicators measured were higher in the NSU both qualitatively and quantitatively; that is, in some markers when in the universities of Cartagena studied the stakeholders responded in agreement, in the NSU they responded highly in agreement, and likewise, the percentages of responses in agreement and highly in agreement were higher in the NSU than in the universities studied in Cartagena. Therefore, it can be pointed out that at NSU there is a greater awareness and appropriation of the aspects that are part of the guidelines and actions that compose the state of the art of university social responsibility.

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