University Social Responsibility from the Perspective of the Different Stakeholders

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The objective of this research is to analyze social responsibility from the stakeholder's perspective to establish whether universities have advanced in their conception. The research is exploratory and conclusive descriptive of the cross-sectional sample. The internal and external stakeholders of the public universities domiciled in Quito were taken into account. The results showed that university managers relate this concept with actions of connection with community, the relevance of the academic offer and the accountability, while students relate this concept with teaching in values and philanthropic activities. For administrative personnel instead, university social responsibility (USR) is related to work benefits. On the other hand, the business sector relates this concept with the answer to their needs of innovation. As expected, representatives of government agencies highlight the university's responses that are necessary to become the engine of economic, productive and social transformation of the country. It is concluded that USR is applied in a partial way, which translates into management models that do not incorporate it as an explicit variable of their actions.

Keywords: university social responsibility, accounts surrender, stakeholders

Introduction

The new global objectives and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ratify the social commitment of universities to the communities with whom they interact and to education in general as the fundamental pillar to achieve these objectives (UNESCO, 2015).

Ecuador, in line with the global commitment, incorporates the expected levels of demand in its essential functions into the normative framework of higher education, underlying the dimensions of USR that together with the rendering of accounts and participation in the national planning constitute principles on which the exercise of university autonomy must be sustained (Calle Ramírez & Santacruz Moncayo, 2011).

Although the models for evaluating the quality of education in Ecuador do not state categorically that the USR is a transversal axis, the dimensions they address respond to the regulatory framework in which this concept is introduced as a fundamental principle. In light of these results, it is important to establish whether Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have moved towards a conscious practice of USR as a principle of continuous improvement, and even more, to determine if their conception exceeds the traditional logic of welfare.

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Faced with this problem, it is proposed to determine how the USR is conceived from the perception of the different interested parties in the work of the public universities of Quito. By not evidencing proposals that guide a conscious and intentionally planned exercise of USR, the contribution of the work is directed to make visible the multidimensional conception with which it should be incorporated in the institutional management. It will be the starting point for a proposal that will make the authorities and other actors aware of the role of the university from the perspective of social responsibility.

This research is structured as follows. In the next section, a bibliographic review of several authors versed in the subject of USR is presented, which allowed us to identify from different perspectives, the dimensions of its composition, from which the variables required for the collection of information were established, object of this investigation. Subsequently, the research methodology is exposed and then the results of the comparative analysis between the USR dimensions and assessment of their impacts that are indicated by the interested parties are presented. Finally, it concludes the advance in the conception of the USR from the perspective of the different actors, in the universities that participated in the investigation.

Literature Review

Larrán-Jorge and Andrades-Peña (2015), based on a comparative analysis of the conceptual precepts of agency theories, stakeholders, legitimacy, resources and capacities and institutional theories, established that the theory of stakeholders is what provides a greater contribution to the construction of the theoretical framework that supports the exercise of social responsibility in universities. For it puts the accent on the "commitment to meeting the needs and/or expectations of the different stakeholders in each of its functions" (p. 103).

On the other hand, worldwide changes are observed in the structures and governance models of universities, which causes a redistribution of responsibilities and power in decision-making by different stakeholders of interest, external and internal, which are based on accountability. Ceacero and Folch (2016) stressed the importance of establishing new coordination mechanisms between stakeholders and control in the university system. In the particular case of state government and universities, for example, the scope of university autonomy and its forms of social responsibility must be redefined. In the same line, Núñez, Alonso, and Pontones (2015) concluded that the essential elements on which the management of the university government should be registered with a perspective of social responsibility are, one "of a strategic nature, related to the definition of the mission itself in terms of social responsibility, and another with respect to information transparency" (p. 102).

Moreover, López, Zalthen, and Carrillo (2015) stated that universities must assume the commitment of social responsibility beyond compliance with regulatory requirements and seek to generate synergies with all internal and external stakeholders. To then propose pragmatic actions in the medium and long term and become protagonists of the change demanded by society. This would be achieved to the extent that social responsibility is incorporated as an explicit variable in university work (Gaete, 2016).

According to the French philosopher Vallaeys (2008), the USR must be applied transversally to university work, keeping the principle of relevance in all its functions. In addition, it highlights as a fundamental characteristic the management of the impacts generated by the university in its environment on the stakeholders. The author groups the USR impacts into four main categories: organizational, educational, cognitive and social.

These impacts determine four axes on which universities should set their own USR strategies, whose interaction generates a dynamic of continuous improvement in all its dimensions: responsible campus, social knowledge management, social participation and professional and citizen training (Vallaeys, 2008).

The USR integrates and balances the university functions, transforming them into its fields of action to fulfill its social mandate (Valarezo, 2014). In the field of management, the quality of the processes and culture of continuous improvement. In teaching, provide the company with professionals with comprehensive training. The research considers a socially responsible practice and that they contribute with solutions to the problems of the environment. In the connection, relationships with social actors and knowledge for the development of the community. As a whole they contribute to improving social, economic and environmental aspects that constitute a contribution to sustainable development (Sánchez & Zaldivar, 2016).

Depending on the level of interaction of the university and participation of stakeholders, and the orientation of their work towards social interests, four models of USR are identified: traditional academic, modern academic and corporate, business and instrumental and global. From another perspective, we can consider three perspectives that model the USR: managerial, transformational, and normative (Gaete, 2015).

The USR must be exercised from the articulation of actions from teaching, research and linking (Portaluppi, 2015). For the association of Jesuit universities in Latin America, the USR should be a transversal axis that allows the implementation of actions in the substantive functions in order to be effective. The USR model is structured based on five dimensions or areas of impact: educational, cognitive and epistemological, social, organizational, environmental (AUSJAL, 2014).

Methodology

The USR requires institutional management to incorporate it as a transversal and strategic axis, so that the impacts of university work in various areas of its environment are considered intentionally in decision-making. Under this framework, Vallaeys, De la Cruz, and Sasia (2009) proposed a self-assessment model for USR, which defines four categories or dimensions of the environment over which the university's performance generates impacts.

The study took into account as interested parties teachers, students, administrators, authorities, companies and regulatory bodies of higher education, with whom the university is linked. Table 1 describes the dimensions of USR and the impacts on stakeholders of the university, as well as the way of measuring these impacts that will allow us to assess the level of USR observed by the institution.

Table 1

Dimensions and Impacts of the USR

Dimension	Definition of impacts on dimensions	Measurement through
Organization	The organization of the university impacts on the quality of life of its internal actors (teachers, administrative staff, students), in the environmental and social field	Good labor practices Systems of ethical and transparent management Good environmental practices
Cognition	The way the university produces knowledge impacts on social, scientific and thought definitions. It encourages the integration of knowledge, articulation of the relationship between technology, science and society, enables the social control and appropriation of knowledge. It asks about the social relevance, for its recipients	Promotion of inter and transdisciplinarity Social relevance of the investigation Social responsibility of science
Participation	University action is a reference and actor in the progress of a country, in the creation of social capital. The participation of students through activities related to the external reality. Direct participation in the accompaniment of social development, through their participation in the resolution of fundamental problems	Inclusive learning communities Social capital networks Socially sustainable development projects
Education	The university intervenes directly in the formation of citizens and integral professionals, in its scale of values, the way they interpret and behave in the world. The relevance of training socially responsible young professionals	Socially consensual curricular meshes Socially relevant and supportive learning Citizen education and responsible professional

Note. Source: Own elaboration based on the model of Vallaeys et al. (2009).

We worked with public universities domiciled in the city of Quito, University of the Armed Forces ESPE, Central University of Ecuador and National Polytechnic School.

The study is of empirical nature with an exploratory and conclusive descriptive research, of individual transversal sample design. For the data collection, the in-depth interview and the survey were used, the latter applied to a random probabilistic sample. The sample size was calculated using the formula of the confidence intervals proportionally, using a sampling error. The reliability of the questionnaire was measured with the application of the internal consistency method by means of Cronbach's alpha. The bivariate analysis was based on the calculation of the correlation coefficient, for the case of the metric variables and the Spearman rank correlation, for the factor variables. The comparison between the means of the metric variables and that of factor, the ANOVAs of a factor was applied. The processing of the information was done through statistical software SPSS.

With these quantitative results, a matrix was designed with average values of each question, which were evaluated on a scale of 1-10. In qualitative research, it is pertinent to clarify that a count of the USR impacts was applied by the interviewees without having a frequency analysis, and based on this, a value was assigned on a scale of 1-10. By arranging the quantitative and qualitative information on the same scale, it was possible to determine an index of perception of the USR, which could mean the biggest contribution of this work.

There were 257 surveys to teachers, of which 40.1% belong to the Central University, 28.1% to the National Polytechnic School and 31.8% to the University of the Armed Forces ESPE. Teachers dedicated to research and who hold a doctor's degree represent 87.3%, and 85.5% belong to a network or research group. Regarding the time of dedication of the teachers surveyed, 66.8% are full time, 20.7% part time and 12.5% part time. The time of attachment to university teaching has an average of 13.18 years and a standard deviation of 8.68, the shortest time is 1 year and the longest time is 46 years.

Out of a total of 598 surveys made to students, 50.3% correspond to the Central University of Ecuador, 24.8% to the National Polytechnic School and 24.9% to the University of the Armed Forces ESPE. In addition, 55.7% of the students belong to the masculine gender and 44.3% to the feminine. It is also showed that 88.9% are dedicated only to university studies, while 11.1% study and work.

As for the administrative staff, 588 surveys were applied, 49.4% to personnel working in the Central University of Ecuador, 25.4% in the National Polytechnic School and 25.2% in the University of the Armed Forces ESPE. Besides, 33.5% are governed by the Labor Code and 66.5% by the Organic Law of Public Service. The time they work in the institution has an average of 8.01 years and a standard deviation of 7.45. In the same way, the minimum time recorded is 3 months and the maximum of 39 years.

The criterion of senior managers of the universities involved in the study was obtained through structured interviews. In the same way, interviews were conducted with managers of public, private and NGO companies recognized for their work in the field of corporate responsibility. Also, to the representatives of the higher education regulatory bodies of Ecuador, Higher Education Council, CES, National Secretariat for Science and Technology, SENESCYT and the National Council for the Evaluation, Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education, CEAACES.

Results

The quantitative results by impact variables that make up each of the dimensions are shown in Table 2, where the averages of the responses of the different internal stakeholders are presented, by impact factor and by scope of the USR.

Table 2

Dimension and Impacts of the USR by Groups of Internal Stakeholders

Dimension and impacts of the USR by group of actors					Assessment scale of 1-10	
Dimension	Impacts	Teachers	Students	Administrative	By impact	By scope
Organization	Good labor practices	Average of 3 questions, 72.5%	Unrealized question	Average of 3 questions, 44.0%	5.83	5.67
	Systems of ethical and transparent management	Average of 4 questions, 58.2%	Average of 3 questions, 66.7%	1 question, 44.2%	5.64	
	Good environmental practices	Average of 2 questions, 58.6%	1 question, 60.4%	Average of 2 questions, 47.0%	5.53	
Cognition	Promotion of inter and transdisciplinarity	1 question, 83.6%	Unrealized question	Unrealized question	8.36	7.13
	Social relevance of the research	Average of 3 questions, 82.4%	1 question, 48.3%	Unrealized question	6.54	
	Social responsibility of science	1 question, 87.3%	1 question, 57.3%	1 question, 50.5%	6.50	
Participation	Inclusive learning communities	1 question, 83.6%	1 question, 70.0%	Unrealized question	7.68	7.49
	Social capital networks	1 question, 85.2%	Unrealized question	Unrealized question	8.52	
	Socially sustainable development projects	Average of 3 questions, 83.5%	1 question, 55.4%	1 question, 49.0%	6.26	
Education	Socially consensual curricular meshes	1 question, 100%	1 question, 82.2%	Unrealized question	9.11	7.41
	Socially relevant and supportive learning	Average of 2 questions, 89.9%	1 question, 64.5%	1 question, 34.0%	6.28	
	Citizen education and responsible professional	Average of 3 questions, 88.8%	1 question, 48.3%	Unrealized question	6.855	
Assessment scale of 1-10 per actor		8.11	6.15	4.48		

Note. This table shows the results of the perception expressed in percentage, of each of the groups of internal actors of the university, on the impact factors by scope of the USR. Source: Own elaboration based on the results of applied surveys.

In general terms, the USR is partially visualized according to the individual interests of the different groups of internal actors. This bias shows a widespread reality in the university field since its concept is recently incorporated and it could be said that it is still under construction. This is revealed by the various studies that have been conducted concerning this topic. Urdaneta, Cova, Chirinos, and González (2016) concluded that certain Venezuelan universities studied retain a partial focus of the USR, primarily towards university extension. In Spanish universities, this principle is maintained, "there is a higher level of awareness actions and establishment of policies and management systems, than in the development of practices directed towards the educational community and the environment" (López, 2016, p. 72).

Table 3 shows the qualitative assessment according to the areas and impact factors of the USR, which were discussed by the representatives of companies, higher education regulatory bodies and university authorities interviewed.

Table 3

Qualitative Results by Scope and Impact Factors of the USR by External Stakeholders

| Topics addressed by the interviewee in his speech | | | | | | | | | | Assessment scale of 1-10 | |
| | | Actors | Company | | Regulatory bodies | | | Authorities | | | |
Ambit	Impacts	Public	Private	NGO	CES	SENESCYT	CEAACES	ESPE	CUE	Impact	Ámbit
Organization	Good labor practices				X					1.25	
	Systems of ethical and transparent management				X	X	X	X	X	6.25	5.00
	Good environmental practices	X	X		X		X	X	X	7.50	
Cognition	Promotion of inter and transdisciplinarity					X			X	2.50	
	Social relevance of the research		X		X	X	X	X	X	7.50	5.42
	Social responsibility of science		X		X	X	X		X	6.25	
Participation	Inclusive learning communities			X	X	X			X	5.00	
	Social capital networks		X		X					2.50	
	Socially sustainable development projects					X		X		2.50	3.33
Education	Socially consensual curricular meshes		X	X	X	X		X	X	7.50	
	Socially relevant and supportive learning	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10.00	9.17
	Citizen education and responsible professional	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	10.00	
1-10	By sample element	2.50	5.83	3.33	8.33	7.50	5.00	5.83	7.50		
	By actor	3.89			6.94			6.67			

Notes. In the table is marked with an X the impacts for each dimension, which from the view of external actors to the university are important to consider in the exercise of the USR. Likewise, the average values of each impact and by area of the USR are shown. We interviewed representatives of higher education regulatory bodies and rectors of the universities that intervened in the study and managers of companies with whom they are related. Source: Own elaboration based on the results of the interviews carried out.

From an exogenous look at the university, bias in the meaning of the USR is maintained, although in the group as a whole, a more integral vision is achieved. On the other hand, the university authorities also assume to the USR in a partial manner what it directly affects so that it is not included explicitly in the management models. Consequently, the USR is not applied systemically and only isolated efforts are shown, not intentionally articulated in each part of the university system (Gaete, 2016).

The analysis of results allowed us to establish a rate of assessment of the USR from the perspective of the interested parties. The valuation by scope, result of the quantitative and qualitative analysis can be differentiated in Table 4.

Table 4

Index of Perception of the USR from the Perspective of the Different Stakeholders

Actors	Partial perception index of USR	Rating scale of 1-10			
		Organization	Cognition	Participation	Education
Teachers	8.11				
Students	6.15	5.67	7.13	7.49	7.41
Administrative	4.48				
Companies	3.89				
Regulatory bodies of higher education	6.94	5	5.42	3.33	9.17
University authorities	6.67				
Global perception index of USR	6.04				

In this table, the values of the Partial Perception Index and the Global Perception Index of USR are observed. The first is calculated based on the average observed by interest group, while the second corresponds to the average of the partial indexes.

With 1 being the maximum value of the USR perception index and 0 the minimum, the maximum value is obtained when all scopes and impact factors are considered in the perception of USR, and 0 when no scope or impact factor is referred by the actors. Quantifying the perception of USR, it is possible to represent it graphically, as illustrated in Figure 1, where the values of the USR Perception Index are observed by stakeholder groups.
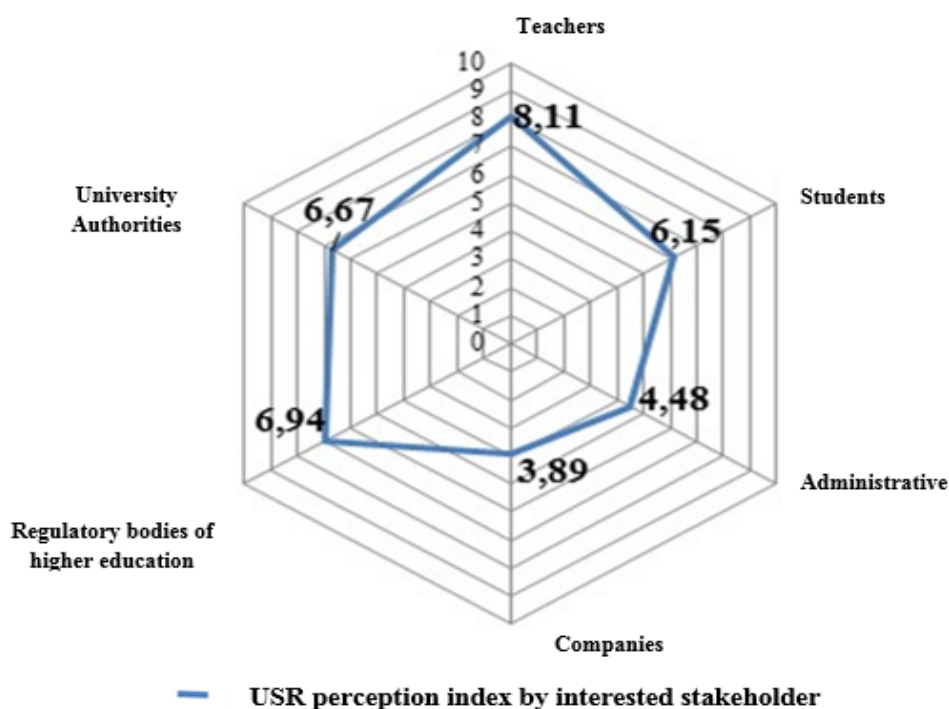

Figure 1. USR perception index by interested stakeholder.

In sum, the partial perception index constitutes a quantitative way of assessing how each group of stakeholders of interest conceptualizes the USR with respect to the dimensions and impact factors, defined in the USR self-assessment model considered for the study.

The study revealed that the representatives of the business sector that participated in the study are those who to a lesser extent perceive the USR in a comprehensive manner, the USR Perception Index was 3.89. The impacts considered jointly by the public business sector are good environmental practices, while the private sector emphasizes good environmental practices, relevance of research and social responsibility of science.

The sector that represents the regulatory bodies of higher education as a whole considers all areas and impacts. However, the bias with the one that is assumed from the individuality of each organism is differentiated. The CES stands out, which links the USR to all the impacts, with the exception of sustainable social development projects. The USR Perception Index reached a value of 6.94.

Teachers assume the USR from all dimensions and impacts, highlighting the education dimension and without major difference, participation, cognition and organization. It is important to note that in the latter, the impact on good labor practices obtained the highest percentage. The USR Perception Index reached is 8.11 and is the highest obtained among all interested parties consulted.

The USR perception index reached in the group of students is 6.15, related to the dimensions of education mainly, and to a lesser extent with participation, organization and cognition, in that order. The administrative staff obtained an index of perception of USR of 4.48, which coincides with the students in the four dimensions of the USR. However, they emphasized cognition, followed by participation, organization and education. Together, the university authorities conceive the USR from all impacts, with the exception of good labor practices and social capital networks. They obtained a USR perception index value of 6.67.

Figure 1 illustrates the value of the USR perception index by stakeholder group, the minimum value obtained is 3.89 for the group of entrepreneurs, followed by 4.48 for the administrative group, 6.15 students, 6.67 university authorities, 6.94 corresponds to representatives of higher education control bodies and finally the maximum value 8.11 to teachers.

The study is complemented with the analysis of the approach that influences the conception of USR by the actors who took part in the study. Following Olarte and Ríos (2015) in the multiple meanings of USR, different approaches can be identified. According to his proposal, since the review of several authors, five approaches are identified that are detailed in Table 5.

Depending on the dimensions and impacts analyzed, the approaches that underlie the conception of USR can be identified. Thus, for the business group, it can be concluded that its conception approaches a sustainable development approach.

The teachers conceive the USR from the perspective of curriculum approaches, university extension, sustainable development and training for civic education, meaning that this group is the one that to a greater extent observes the integrality of the USR.

In the group of students, the predominant focus is that of curriculum and there is less emphasis on university extension. In the administrative staff, the predominant approach is university extension, followed by the politician.

The set of university authorities conceive the USR from all approaches, although if we consider the individual results of each institution, each authority assumes from a partial view and not from the integral. The results coincide with those obtained by Gaete (2015) when analyzing the concept of USR from the understanding expressed by the directors of some universities in Chile.

Table 5

Concepts and Scopes of USR According to Several Authors

Scope considered in the conception of USR	USR concept	Representative authors
Curriculum	Ethical behavior of the universities that through the transformation of their curricula and their pedagogical model seek to respond to the needs of the community through comprehensive civic and professional training	Ruiz and Soria (2009) Ganga and Navarrete (2012) Bryant, Gayles, and Davis (2012) Martínez and Hernández (2013)
Political	Set of personal, social and institutional principles and values, based on which the policies that influence the management and establishment of university culture are established. Observing a gradual change in the individual and overall behavior of the entire university community towards a civic commitment	Atunes and Martínez (2008) Reybold (2008) Bryant et al. (2012) Martínez and Hernández (2013)
College extension	Missional axis through which the university fulfills its duty to train integral ethical professionals. It allows generating actions of interaction with its environment to respond to social and cultural demands	Ruiz and Soria (2009) Martínez and Hernández (2013) Dima, Vasilache, Ghinea, and Agoston (2013)
Sustainable development	Related to the UNESCO policy of training integral professionals who can forge a sustainable future. The USR is conceptualized as a way to encourage responsible consumption models that permeate from the interior of the university to society. It includes the promotion of sustainability from research	UNESCO (1998) Atunes and Martínez (2008)
Training for civic education	Inserted in the pedagogical models in order to motivate socially responsible behaviors, based on principles of quality, relevance and equity. Where communication and management of information are the pillars to ensure success in decision-making	Butcher, Bezzina, and Moran (2011) Atunes and Martínez (2008) Goni, Sahran, Mukhtar, Shukor, and Chofren (2013)

Notes. In the table, the concepts of USR are classified according to the scope of USR that it involves, likewise reference is made to the authors that coincide in their conception of USR. Source: Own elaboration based on Olarte and Ríos (2015).

Finally, the interested parties that were considered in the study agree on the urgency of shortening distances between the university, the State and the business sector. So that consistent links are generated that stimulate a dynamic interrelation as a strategy to achieve the development of Ecuadorian society in all its dimensions. Hernández and Alvarado (2015) agreed in their analysis with the multidimensional meaning of the USR. They emphasized the importance of promoting the relationship between the university, business and the State in order to promote, among others, the development of research.

Conclusions

It was identified that the multidimensional appreciation of the USR is common among all groups interested in university performance. However, they conceive it partially with respect to the dimensions and impacts described in the study. The divergences in the dimensions and impacts defined by each group are explained by the different interests that mobilize their participation inside or outside the university system, as well as by their own interpretation of the USR concept. This biased perspective, especially of the university authorities, is translated into management models that do not incorporate the USR as an explicit variable of their university work.

Socially responsible universities must assume the commitment of the USR beyond a traditional action of university extension and respond to the particular demands of internal and external stakeholders, with an integrated and comprehensive vision. All agree on a necessary and urgent coordinated work to cope jointly with the development requirements of the country, each from its own field of action.

An important limitation was that in none of the universities where the study was developed, the USR has been instituted as part of the daily work, only perceived as a set of indicators that must be fulfilled in the framework of quality accreditation to which are bound by law. This does not happen in the business sector, where they relate to corporate social responsibility, whose concept has a higher level of development.

Another limitation for the investigation is related to the variety of meanings found about USR, which mostly derive from specific studies, which does not allow us to easily reach generalizations of the evolution of the concept. However, it was possible to establish worldwide trends that stem mainly from the social function given to the university in UNESCO's world meetings. One of these is related to the work in collaborative networks, which will facilitate the understanding of the scope of the impacts of an application of the USR from an integral perspective.

In this context, it is advisable to create a national network of universities around the USR, which is a space for discussion, generation and implementation of models, programs, plans and projects, which promotes the construction of a socially responsible culture in the Ecuadorian universities. Undoubtedly, this network should involve all the actors that have been considered in this study.

On the other hand, in order to validate the USR Perception Index, it will be necessary to replicate the study methodology in other spaces.

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