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12 feb 2016, 10:30



📧 a me, Sergio ▾

🌐 inglese ▾ > italiano ▾ [Traduci messaggio](#)

[Disattiva per: inglese](#) ✕

Dear Laura,

Thanks for getting in contact and apologies for any lack of specificity in my previous mail.

I am not sure as to the H2020 event you are referring. I guess it is social sciences which is separate from SWAFS (which is where RE-AGoRA is funded from). However I know that the Commission is keen to see RRI embedded in other thematic areas. Could you please send me the link and I will see if someone from Newcastle is going.

Thank you also for the GUNI piece. I have forwarded this to the managing editor in Barcelona and I am sure she will come back with some specific guidelines.

Kind regards

John

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Download our EU publication - Connecting Universities to Regional Economic Growth: A Practical Guide
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/presenta/universities2011/universities2011_en.pdf



GUNI SERIES ON THE SOCIAL COMMITMENT OF UNIVERSITIES

Higher Education in the World 6

Towards a Socially
Responsible University:
Balancing the Global with the Local

Higher Education in the World 6.
Towards a Socially Responsible University: Balancing the Global with the Local

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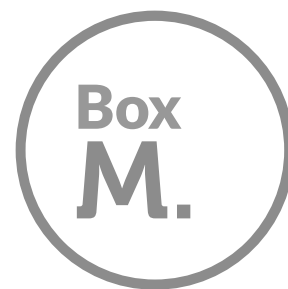
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The case of the University of Torino and the Process of Social Reporting

Laura Corazza

Introduction

Universities have a key role in influencing society, which they exercise through the three areas of teaching, research and 'society outreach'. The relationship between universities and society has a double effect: on the one hand, it has a social impact in the local arena, and, on the other, the aim is to attain a high global international reputation in competition with other universities. As a consequence, the management of institutional governance for a shared *glocal* engagement mission requires paradigms, strategies, policies and tools for achieving both local and a global goals.

In order to successfully manage the institutional pressures and the engagement of its stakeholders, the University of Torino decided to implement a process of social reporting that includes enlisting local stakeholder engagement. The process has been carried out by an editorial team composed of teaching and administrative staff, and supported by the strong commitment of the academic governance body. The content of the resulting 'sustainability report' is focused on achieving the three missions, and includes the disclosure of the results of the policies adopted by the institution to fulfil its social and environmental goals. This tool is used to highlight its accountability as a public university and reinforce the lines of communication with stakeholders (going beyond the practice of only disclosing administrative data to ministries). As such, wider informative purposes are achieved through the disclosure of performance indicators which meet

the needs of a broad range of internal and external stakeholders (mapped and engaged). The disclosure of material information forms the essential core of the report and stakeholders have been consulted in order to determine their information needs. In addition, the tool has the managerial effect of monitoring the yearly sustainability performance of the University of Torino.

The case of the University of Torino and the process of social reporting

With over 67,000 students (3,800 international) and more than 4,000 academic and administrative staff, the University of Torino (UniTo) in north-west Italy is one of the country's largest and most prestigious universities. Founded in 1404, today UniTo offers over 150 undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses in almost every field of study.

A growing number of courses are taught in English, and Italian-language tuition is available for incoming students (UniTo offers courses in all subjects except Engineering and Architecture). The university's 27 departments offer training and research opportunities for Italian and non-Italian academic staff; four doctoral schools provide 29 doctoral programmes; start-up incubators offer services relating to knowledge transfer; and there is a research centre dedicated to public engagement. More than 120 university buildings are located in the city of Turin and in the metropolitan area (including offices, libraries, laboratories, etc.). As an example of social

impact, UniTo manages half of the health services provided to Turin's citizens through strong collaboration with the local hospital (one of the biggest in Europe).

These structural elements of UniTo imply that the university exercises economic, social and environmental impacts over the local area. Simultaneously, the increasingly competitive international research environment requires that the university enjoys a high academic reputation in international rankings, while recognition of UniTo's social responsibilities is necessary so that it may make a concrete contribution to the sustainable development of society and maintain its reputation in the local community.

For these reasons, UniTo, backed by the strong commitment of its rector, has included in its management strategies (i.e. its Strategic Plan), in addition to its core missions, several social and environmental goals, for example:

- » Removing economic and social obstacles which limit access to higher education;
- » Upholding the right to work and the creation of employment;
- » Enhancing corporate welfare;
- » Participating in the elaboration of development strategies and contributing to the competitiveness of the territory;
- » Communicating to stakeholders those initiatives implemented in areas of social, environmental and economic sustainability;
- » Promoting environmental sustainability (through an energy-saving plan);
- » Supporting economic sustainability.

The process of reporting on and accounting for these social responsibilities is based on the work of Lozano (2011). The process starts with the choice of guidelines used to edit the sustainability report. Despite the presence of several guidelines, there is no clear standard for sustainability reporting in universities and the existing guidelines must be contextualized. In the case of UniTo, an international reporting standard (Global Reporting Initiative) has represented the recommended choice in terms of the different phases employed: materiality analysis, stakeholder engagement activities, interviews, data retrieval and editing. It transpires that editing a sustainability report is an organizational process. In that sense, those involved in the process are used to working within a heterogeneous group under the guidance of the rector of UniTo. The working group is composed of: the vice-rector for Public Relations, the director of the Finance Department, professors, researchers, experts and administrative staff members.

The involvement of different professionals in the scientific committee has the advantage of facilitating information retrieval, as access to uncoded knowledge varies under different conditions (for instance, data related to scientific projects are different from data concerning financial expenditures or data related to carbon emissions, and people manage data differently). Furthermore, different data owners have different perceptions regarding the importance of data management and timing considerations (for example, approaches to deadline), as well as different attitudes towards data responsibility. However, one solution implemented in UniTo is to communicate the importance of sustainability reporting not only as a communication tool with external stakeholders, but also in its coherence with other internal and external documents produced by the university in order to fulfil mandatory ministerial regulations or for management purposes

(budget, plans, etc.). The process of sustainability reporting has boosted the awareness of the need for a clearly identified organizational structure to deal with sustainability issues in UniTo. As a consequence, UniTo is creating a permanent board, with an inclusive management model, where students, professors, managers and other personnel can deal with sustainability actions together.

The logical process of accounting should be the last phase of a sustainability plan, even in the case of UniTo, where the managerial variables, numbers of students, professors, financial resources and intangible resources are complex, while the first edition of a sustainability report presents a snapshot of the existing situation. In order to set concrete plans for the future, the sustainability report should highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the managerial and governance centres of the university in terms of sustainability issues. The use of reliable information based on shared data reinforces the communicative purpose of the document, allowing people to speak clearly and translating a complex administrative process into easy-to-understand contents. In addition, the choice of the reporting guidelines, which in this case are internationally well-known, allows UniTo to speak the same language as the other organizations adopting the same guidelines, such as local and international companies, NGOs and other universities.

Adapting the content of the sustainability report to the requirements of the guidelines has a double effect. The first is the disclosure of only relevant information, without redundancies. The second is having the ability to actively manage every aspect of the performance indicators disclosed (i.e. gender balance, financial ratios, carbon emissions, water consumption, rate of university leavers, etc.), thus creating benchmarks and suggesting policies.

In conclusion, managing the process of sustainability reporting requires a strong commitment from the academic governing bodies and a passionate team of dedicated staff. Conversely, the process itself is a source of added value for managing the relationship between university and society. The report facilitates a transparent dialogue with stakeholders and simplifies the language used by public administrators in making information available to a wide audience, as the reader can find different types of information in one document (financial, social and environmental, as well as statistics relating directly to the university, for example numbers of students, graduates, courses, research projects awarded, patents, etc.). Finally, such reporting allows universities to make a concrete contribution in terms of sustainable development by indicating any gaps in their governance related to teaching, researching and transferring knowledge.

Reference

Lozano, R. (2011) The state of sustainability reporting in universities. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 12(1), pp. 67–78.