

Quality of Life in Asia 8

Daniel T.L. Shek  
Robert M. Hollister *Editors*

# University Social Responsibility and Quality of Life

A Global Survey of Concepts and  
Experiences

 Springer

# Quality of Life in Asia

Volume 8

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Editors

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ISSN 2211-0550

Quality of Life in Asia

ISBN 978-981-10-3876-1

DOI 10.1007/978-981-10-3877-8

ISSN 2211-0569 (electronic)

ISBN 978-981-10-3877-8 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017930951

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Springer imprint is published by Springer Nature

The registered company is Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd.

The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

# Preface

The contemporary world is facing many problems such as global warming, poverty, income disparities, refugees, aging populations, and new diseases. Obviously, how to solve these problems is a challenging task for leaders in the national, regional, and global contexts. As universities are commonly regarded as incubators for knowledge and solutions to promote quality of life, it is important to ask how universities can help to build a better world. In fact, it is the public expectation that universities should generate knowledge which can solve real-life problems which can eventually promote quality of life.

In the business sector, the notion of “corporate social responsibility” (CSR) has received growing attention in the past few decades. Fundamentally, the spirit of CSR maintains that besides maximizing profits, business enterprises should also look at how they can fulfill their social responsibilities such as promotion corporate governance, reduction of corruption and collusion, limiting negative and maximizing positive environmental and other impacts of their operations, and provision of voluntary service to the underprivileged and needy groups. Major corporations throughout the world regard CSR as a desired attribute of a company which would eventually promote corporate image and reputation.

As universities are corporations, the notion of CSR is applicable to universities to some extent. Nevertheless, as maximization of profit is not a common goal of universities and educational service is different from commercial activities, there is a need to explore the notion of “university social responsibility” (USR) as an emergent field of academic inquiry and practice. When we look at the experiences of different universities, different ways of promoting USR are evident. Some examples of USR missions include the following: establishment of communities within and outside the University which promotes social responsibilities in different stakeholders; promotion of activities which are ethical, inclusive, and beneficial to the public; emphasis on environmental conservation, sustainability, and balanced social development; promotion of welfare and quality of life of people, especially the needy and vulnerable populations; and commitment to building a better world. Typically, these missions are accomplished via teaching, research, and services within the university community and in collaboration with other bodies. There

clearly is a growing movement among institutions of higher education to expand and strengthen these functions.

To promote USR in universities, several universities from different parts of the world have established the University Social Responsibility Network (USR Network). At this stage, in the USR movement it is especially timely to document and disseminate the work-in-progress of universities. Documenting and sharing institutional experiences of different types of universities and across borders can be particularly productive at this time of innovation, ferment, and growing activity. This book documents and reflects upon diverse USR experiences in different universities. We are publishing this volume to mark the beginning of the USR Network.

There are several unique features of this book. First, the role of universities in social responsibilities in different contexts is explored. Second, the background of the establishment of the pioneer USR Network and its possible future directions are described. Third, an innovative project on the possible assessment of USR is reported, which provides a first step in the exploration of the possible assessment of USR. Fourth, USR experiences in different parts of the world, including universities in North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Middle East, Australia, and Asia are presented and analyzed.

From the experiences revealed in these chapters, several observations can be highlighted. First, different universities have different goals and strategies with respect to their USR initiatives. Second, different USR programs with different levels of sophistication, resources, and commitment have been designed, which can provide excellent reference points for the development of the USR policies and programs of other institutions. Third, stakeholders including teachers, non-teaching staffs, and students can be (and are) involved in USR activities. Fourth, there is a need to step up work on the assessment of USR initiatives, a need to conduct more evaluation work of USR efforts, particularly with reference to the impact of USR on different stakeholders. Obviously, having good intentions to promote well-being is not enough. We need rigorous evaluation to demonstrate the impact. Fifth, as USR initiatives are mostly done within the context of a single university, there is a need to further promote inter-institutional USR initiatives. As such, the USR Network is an excellent vehicle to promote inter-institutional USR initiatives. Finally, as USR theory and research are still in their infancy, there is a need to strengthen the theoretical framework and basic research on USR. For example, it is important to know what basic qualities should be nurtured in students so that they can participate competently in USR activities such as service-learning, and in order to maximize what they learn in the process. In the recent decades, different ranking systems have been designed to rank universities and these regimes powerfully influence university strategic planning and decision-making. For example, in the *Times Higher Education World University Rankings*, performance indicators in five areas are used. These include teaching (reputation survey, staff to student ratio, doctorate to bachelor ratio, doctorate awards to academic staff ratio), research (volume, income and reputation), citations per paper, international outlook (ratio of international to domestic staff, ratio of international to domestic students, and

international collaboration), and industry income. Unfortunately, no indicator of USR performance is included. Similarly, USR criteria are not included in the *QS World University Rankings* in which indicators related to academic peer review, faculty–student ratio, citations for faculty, employer reputation, international student ratio, and international staff ratio are employed. Again, USR activities are not included in the assessment. Of course, some criteria employed such as citations per faculty staff are an important indicator for assessing academic impact of a university. However, having strong academic impact does not necessarily mean that the university is excelling in improving the well-being of the society. Alternatively, we can argue that the percentage of students who have taken service-learning subjects may give a better indication of a university’s service to the community. As such, we earnestly hope that the university rankings will start to incorporate USR activities in future. By doing this, universities would be reminded about the important responsibility that they have to promote quality of life of the society and the world, and their efforts to do so will be reinforced. At present, the complete lack of attention to USR in the rankings seriously undercuts their social responsibility obligations and opportunities, and skews their work toward other functions.

This book would not exist without the enthusiastic support of colleagues from different member institutions in the USR Network. Therefore, we must express our deep gratitude to them. In the Chinese culture, there is the saying of “throwing a brick to attract a jade” (pao zhuan yin yu). Hence, we treat this book as a “brick” which can attract “jades” in future and it is our modest wish that this book is a kickoff step in the book series on university social responsibility. We hope very much that colleagues in the field of USR will devote more effort in the future to documenting and assessing USR experiences.

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## About the Editors

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**Robert M. Hollister** is founding executive director emeritus and co-founder of the Talloires Network, a global coalition of over 350 universities in 76 countries committed to strengthening civic engagement and social responsibility in higher education. He was founding dean of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University (2000–2011), where he is currently a professor at the Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning. A pioneer in the engaged university movement, Prof. Hollister led the creation and development of the Tisch College Civic Life, a uniquely comprehensive university-wide program to prepare students in all fields for lifetimes of active citizenship—and to produce citizen engineers and citizen physicians, citizen humanists, and citizen business people. A specialist in citizen participation in public affairs and in the leadership and management of nonprofit organizations, Prof. Hollister is a co-author of *The Engaged University: International Perspectives on Civic Engagement and Development Politics*.

**Part I**  
**Introduction**

# Chapter 1

## The Project: Theoretical Framework and Global Institutional Experience

Robert M. Hollister

**Abstract** Goals of this book are to: improve the theoretical framework about university social responsibility (USR); disseminate the USR experience of a geographically diverse group of twelve universities; demonstrate the value of global exchange on this topic; further develop the sponsoring organization, the University Social Responsibility Network; and encourage and guide further research. The introductory chapter highlights key themes with respect to conceptualization of USR and discusses six common themes that are explored in the institutional case accounts: opportunities and challenges about university-community partnerships, processes and strategies of institutional change, national policies that are influencing USR, student programming and the impacts of these initiatives on students' development, application of research to addressing societal problems, and the corporate social responsibility of universities—social responsibility impacts of university institutional policies and practices.

**Keywords** University social responsibility · University Social Responsibility Network · Theory

This book is a multi-university, global project with several goals. First, to conceptualize (and reconceptualize) the field of endeavor called “university social responsibility” (USR), to help strengthen theoretical frameworks with respect to this dimension of higher education. Second, to document and share the experience of twelve institutions of higher education that are committed to elevating their social responsibility, and to illustrate the work-in-progress of a geographically diverse

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group of universities. We aim in this volume to present fresh knowledge about USR, and contribute to overcoming the predominance in the literature of experience and perspectives from the Global North. We hope that these accounts will inform others' efforts to strengthen USR—initiatives by individual universities and also by public policy-makers. A third function is to demonstrate the value of global exchange on this important topic. As the global USR movement is rapidly gaining momentum, it is especially timely to disseminate information about what constitutes effective USR in diverse settings, so that the next wave of institutional initiatives can benefit from what peer universities have learned. The featured institutions are located in nine countries and represent all continents. They include universities that are advanced and widely recognized for their social responsibility (SR) work, and others that are deeply committed to strengthening this dimension of their operations, but are at earlier stages in its development.

Fourth, through this project of the University Social Responsibility Network (USRN), we strive to strengthen and further develop the Network itself. With its commitment to building sustained collaboration on a few selected challenges, the University Social Responsibility Network is playing a unique international leadership role in advancing USR. And finally, the book seeks to encourage and guide future research about university social responsibility. To date, the USR movement has been long on rhetoric, but short on evidence about its impacts and about what constitutes effective strategies. There is an urgent need, and also a great collective opportunity, to build a broader and deeper factual foundation about USR. The knowledge base should represent the full range of experience around the world.

The opening chapter “University Social Responsibility Network: A Platform to Promote University Social Responsibility” describes the origins, goals and distinctive features of this global alliance. The next section explores conceptual and theoretical underpinnings. Then a set of case studies describe and analyze selected aspects of the SR work of twelve universities that represent a diverse cross-section of higher education. A concluding chapter highlights key themes and advocates directions for future action and research.

In the section on “Concepts and Theoretical Considerations,” two chapters review alternative concepts of USR, trace its evolution over time, and examine factors that have shaped changing approaches to USR. These chapters provide theoretical framework for reading the institutional cases presented in the next section. These theoretical directions may also be useful to practitioners and researchers more broadly.

Carlos Wing-Hung Lo, Rose Xue Pang, Carolyn P. Egri, and Pansy Hon-Ying Li in “University Social Responsibility: Conceptualization and an Assessment Framework” note that while USR has grown rapidly, its conceptual foundation has been slow to develop. Their chapter helps to address this gap. Defining USR as “a progressive management system for pursuing sustainability”, the authors review the evolution of USR, then propose a specific conceptual model, and offer a framework for assessing institutional performance. Causal factors examined include the corporate social responsibility movement, global growth in the number of students, the unique role that universities play in their respective regions, and technological

innovation. Primary dimensions of the proposed model are values, process and impact. These dimensions are defined in relation to five major functions: university governance, teaching and learning, research, community service, and environmental sustainability. The model is organized around the roles and perspectives of a comprehensive set of stakeholders (students, employees, the environment, government and funding bodies, communities, peer universities, and suppliers).

In “From Historical to the Contemporary Challenges”, Daniel T.L. Shek, Angelina W.K. Yuen-Tsang, and Eddie C.W. Ng analyze the changing nature and the context of higher education in a time of advancing globalization, and how these trends shape USR. The chapter focuses on component trends of globalization, including increasing student mobility and curriculum development in a global marketplace that emphasizes preparing students for employment and the overall economic development impacts of higher education. The authors call for clarifying what is meant by university social responsibility and for strengthening collective understanding of how best to improve USR. The institutional accounts presented in the section on “Global Experience” address the challenges articulated by Shek et al. —to elevate conceptual clarity and also to sharpen awareness of effective strategic approaches.

In a global context, “university social responsibility” is the phrase that is used most widely to describe the public and community service activities and impacts of institutions of higher education. It is often used to refer to what Global Northern representatives call “civic engagement” and “community engagement.” In many discussions, the terms “social responsibility” and “civic engagement” are used interchangeably. However, it is important to note that “university social responsibility” also can be, and in practice often is, a more encompassing concept, one that includes the social impacts of the full range of university functions, and includes corporate social responsibility issues such as the energy efficiency of building design, employment policies, purchasing and financial management. There is considerable division of opinion among university leaders and stakeholders as to whether their social responsibility efforts should take this more inclusive approach. As the opening chapter indicates, this more inclusive meaning of “university social responsibility” is indeed embraced by the University Social Responsibility Network. Therefore, a number of the institutional profiles pay attention to institutional policies and practices that reach beyond student volunteering and service learning, and applied research.

Some of the case studies that follow in the section on “Global Experience” present an overview of the institution’s SR activities; others focus on selected programs or dimensions. As a group, the cases explore a number of common themes—university-community partnerships, processes and strategies of institutional change, the influence of national policies on USR, student programming, impacts on students and their development, research applied to community and societal problems, and the social responsibility of institutional policies and practices beyond teaching, research and service activities. The cases provide a broad range of examples of different kinds of societal issues that USR work addresses, including,

for example, the needs of older people (The University of Manchester), poverty alleviation (Peking University), health (Sichuan University and University of Pretoria), disaster response and management (Sichuan University), sustainability (The Hong Kong Polytechnic University), social conflicts (University of Haifa), the needs of children and adolescents (University of São Paulo), and economic development (University of Pretoria).

A rich dimension of a number of the cases, including University of Haifa, The University of Manchester, Kyoto University, and Washington University in St. Louis, is their focus on *opportunities and challenges with respect to university-community partnerships*. The University of Haifa account reviews the literature on university-community partnerships, noting the breadth and vagueness of this concept, and summarizing research about common barriers to effective university-community collaboration. The authors then challenge the conventional perspective, “the binary concept of cooperation and conflict as opposing concepts.” They offer an alternative framework organized around four paradoxes and use these to explain the University of Haifa experience—top-down work versus bottom-up work, organizational relationships versus organizational effectiveness, egalitarian approach vs. hierarchical structures, and forging a common vision versus celebrating multiple identities. They use these paradoxes to explain the work to date of the University of Haifa’s Flagship program, an interdisciplinary initiative to combat social exclusion and to promote solidarity among conflicting population groups. The Haifa co-authors state, “This perspective gives room for the many contradictions, tensions and dichotomies that characterize the complex relationship between academy and community.” In other words, these opposites co-exist in the Haifa experience. The authors suggest that this framework can help to guide project planning and implementation of university-community partnerships in other settings.

The University of Manchester chapter presents an extensive university-community research partnership that aims to develop “age-friendly” communities in the city. The Manchester project involves older people as co-investigators, training and supporting them to participate directly in the conduct of research. This case describes the process of organizing the research collaboration, shares results, and discusses challenges encountered. The impacts of the study are impressive in terms of the creation of fresh knowledge, the direct use of the findings by political actors and policy stakeholders, and also the positive contributions to the capabilities of the older Manchester residents as they “co-produce” fresh knowledge.

*Processes and strategies of institutional change* receive considerable attention in the institutional accounts. A number of the cases relate how the university’s SR efforts have changed over time and why, and describe strategies for strengthening the institution’s SR, including new organizational arrangements. The University of Pretoria chapter describes how that university moved from a needs-based, community service approach to a community development orientation. As the latter paradigm took hold, charity-like projects and services that bred dependency were replaced and the university involved and empowered “people in communities in determining their own priority needs as well as in planning, implementing and



evaluating development programs.” The University of Pretoria established a Unit for Development Support to support its expanding community engagement programs, and community engagement is a significant priority in its Strategic Plan 2025. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University has taken the dramatic step of requiring all undergraduates to complete an academic credit-bearing community service learning course. In order to successfully implement this new graduate requirement, the university has established an Office of Service Learning to expand and sustain partnerships with community organizations and to enhance the ability of faculty members to teach service learning courses. Tufts University established a university-wide college that functions and that is a resource to all schools and academic units to promote education for active citizenship across the curriculum. The University of New South Wales has made the promotion of social responsibility as a major strategy priority, and has put in place a new organizational structure and a senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor position to deliver on this commitment. At the University of São Paulo, the Pro Rectory of Culture and Extension mobilizes and coordinates an impressive set of arts and cultural resources of the University to address societal needs and to reduce inequalities of all sorts. In order to elevate its social responsibility efforts with its host city and region, Kyoto University has established a new Education and Research Unit for Regional Alliances and also initiated a Unit for Promotion of Education and Research in Cooperation with Local Communities.

A few of the cases show how in some countries *national policy is playing an influential role in advancing USR*. A strategic theme in the Chinese National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020) calls on universities to enhance “students’ sense of social responsibility to serve the country and the people.” This national policy directive has guided and accelerated the development of SR programs at Beijing Normal University, Peking University, Sichuan University, and The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Haifa University’s SR efforts have been directly encouraged by policies of the Israeli Council for Higher Education that explicitly encourages institutions of higher education to organize academic-community partnerships and to develop civic engagement courses. Post-apartheid South African national education policy has motivated and shaped significantly the expanding SR efforts at University of Pretoria. In 1997, the new national policy stated an expectation that institutions of higher education “demonstrate social responsibility” and that they “promote and develop social responsibility and awareness amongst students of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programs.”

*Student programming and the impacts of these initiatives on students’ development* is discussed in all of the cases and is the focus of the accounts from Washington University in St. Louis and the University of New South Wales. The Washington University in St. Louis chapter presents that institution’s commitment to developing “reciprocal, mutually-beneficial partnerships with local community groups” and emphasizes the civic values and skills that students learn by participating in these university-community partnerships. The authors note that the

literature about civic learning strategies and outcomes pays scant attention to the role and effects on the students of university-community partnerships. “A community partnership approach is absent from civic learning frameworks, outcomes, and assessment tools.” They review existing major frameworks for assessing changes in civic learning and then describe how they have used at Washington University the Civic-Minded Graduate model developed by the Center for Service and Learning at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

The University of New South Wales (UNSW) utilizes two different co-curricular approaches to develop socially responsible students through volunteering—an intensive program that involves students seeking an opportunity for deep engagement, and a less intensive option in which a larger number of students participate. The intensive option involves students in a broad range of community service activities, supported by preparatory workshops and reflection sessions. The second program places a larger number of UNSW students in schools in disadvantaged communities to support K-12 students’ academic progress and to elevate their educational aspirations. The university assesses the impacts of both programs on students’ sense of social responsibility and also involves community partners in the evaluation process.

The Beijing Normal University chapter describes “Three Approaches to Cultivating College Students’ Sense of Social Responsibility”—academic, professional, and public services. The academic approach involves integrating social responsibility education into a wide range of courses and students’ participation in research projects. Through the professional strategy, students have multiple opportunities to apply their classroom learning in practice. Receiving greatest emphasis at present is the third, public services approach, an extensive array of student volunteer projects.

Peking University has a rich history of student volunteering including, for the past 35 years, the One Hundred Villages’ Social Investigation through which many PKU students collect information about the health and living conditions of retirees in towns and villages across the country. More recently, the Loving Heart Society has grown into an extensive set of student voluntary programs in local communities.

Several of the institutional cases describe how a major dimension of the university’s social responsibility is the *direct application of research to addressing societal and community problems*. Sichuan University, in addition to promoting social responsibility through many courses and student volunteer associations, has mobilized its research capabilities in a major effort on natural disaster prevention and response. The Sichuan institutional account also describes several applied research initiatives to address pressing regional challenges, including building the capacity of women in rural areas, developing new health service models for the elderly, and establishing a birth defects pedigree database and DNA bank. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University case describes substantial research programs to promote sustainability. At Peking University, eight academic departments have undertaken a long-term poverty alleviation initiative in Yunnan Province that combines research, training and direct provision of health and human services.

As was noted earlier, the corporate social responsibility movement has significantly influenced the growth of university social responsibility. USR includes *the SR impacts of university institutional policies and practices*. It is about not only that social responsibility goals and impacts of academic institutions' defining missions of teaching, research and service, but also extends to the social responsibility aspirations and achievements of their policies and practices as *corporate* entities. The University of Pretoria case includes a section on its corporate social responsibility, discussing the example of its procurement and employment policies. An expression of corporate social responsibility at Sichuan University is its creation of smoke-free campuses and hospitals. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University chapter describes the university's efforts "to promote sustainability in planning, development and operation of the campus environment and facilities as well as to develop sustainability initiatives in education, research and community service activities."

A concluding chapter "Global Experience to Date and Future Directions" summarizes major points that emerged from the institutional case studies and suggests future opportunities for action and research, organized around the same six common themes discussed above—university-community partnerships, processes of institutional change, national policy, student programming, applied research, and universities' corporate SR.

# Chapter 2

## USR Network: A Platform to Promote University Social Responsibility

Daniel T.L. Shek, Angelina W.K. Yuen-Tsang and Eddie C.W. Ng

**Abstract** Higher Education is facing rapid and enormous change, one of which is the corporatization of higher education. Given the market-driven nature of university education, a natural and reasonable concern is its social responsibility towards the community it serves, particularly when corporate social responsibility is the normative expectation of contemporary organizations by the general public. This is also an intrinsic mission of the university. This chapter aims to outline the importance of University Social Responsibility (USR) and the emergence of such an initiative entitled University Social Responsibility Network (USRN) initiated by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. In particular, we pay close attention to the network development of the collective effort, in contrast to the endeavor of a single institution. The rationale, mission, organizational structure and strategy of USRN, as well as the strengths and challenges of this partnership approach, will also be discussed particularly drawing on the lessons learned from other similar and related initiatives. Ideas for the future development of the USRN are also discussed.

**Keywords** University social responsibility · The Hong Kong Polytechnic University · USR network · Civic engagement · Partnership approach

### 2.1 Background

The call for increased community engagement of the higher education sector has received attention for some time. A recent attempt, under the notion of University Social Responsibility (USR), has received much attention given the enormous

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This work is financially supported by the Global Youth Leadership Institute at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

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changing environment in the higher education setting. Especially the commercialization of higher education with the increasing trend of for-profit higher education has gained much notice (Morey 2004; Vasilescu et al. 2010). While universities are steering towards the market mechanism but still enjoying much autonomy and academic freedom, social responsibility becomes the normative expectation of nowadays organization (including university) by the general public (Vasilescu et al. 2010). On one hand, some traditional top tier universities still focus on the narrow perspective on knowledge (e.g., technical rationality) and enjoy the prestige gained from academic “ivory tower” (Hoyt and Hollister 2014). On the other hand, other newly established universities benefit from the “massification” and rapid expansion of higher education system, primarily emphasizing student enrolment and providing traditional curricula. No wonder some scholars will doubt if universities “miss what matters most” (Basken 2016, p. 3).

Apart from the reactive response to the accountability issue towards the society and relevant stakeholders, proactively speaking, USR could also play a significant role in the societal development. Herrera (2009) notes that educators have to be creative and use multidisciplinary strategies to ensure the sustainable development of people, while USR is one such approach because USR includes wide ranges of actions and processes, which help facilitate the greater alignment between the university and the societal need in an appropriate manner and with a strong sense of ethics. Herrera even argues that USR is seriously needed in the present, as the globalization and the over-reliance on the economic development have created many social ills, which the university could solve by utilizing their knowledge. “This approach is of great importance because globalization and the application of neo-liberal models of economic development have led to social crises to which universities must respond by providing innovative solutions to the complexity of the current problems at the national and regional levels (Herrera 2009, p. 40).” Therefore, while the traditional and more civic oriented mission of higher education is slowly giving way to the profit motive in the practice of some higher education providers, raising the profile of USR could not only restate the often ignored, if not lost, mission of the higher education, but also raise the spirit and aspiration of educators for the greater good of the society.

This chapter outlines the importance of USR and the emergence of an initiative, University Social Responsibility Network (USRN) initiated by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. In particular, we pay close attention to the network development of the collective effort, in contrast to the endeavor of each institution (which will be presented throughout this volume). Besides the rationale, mission, organizational structure and strategy of USRN, the strengths and challenges of this partnership approach will also be discussed particularly drawing on the lesson learned from the other similar and related endeavor. Ideas for the future development of the USRN are also discussed.

## 2.2 Definition of USR

The social relevance of higher education has been discussed in the literature. De Ketele (2009) highlights that the importance of higher education is best expressed through the variety of “academic services” it offers for the society, while taking into consideration the needs of people and society. Herrera (2009) notices that the new notion of USR steps further to request educational policies, which could “encourage greater correspondence between the fundamental objectives of universities and the environment in which they operate” (p. 40). In practice, it is to promote the social usefulness of knowledge, as a result contributing to improving the quality of life. As Herrera notes, USR requires “a two-way perspective between universities and society, which involves directly multiplying the critical uses of knowledge in society and the economy” (p. 40).

Acknowledging that USR is a wide-ranging and evolving concept, which is open to interpretations, we propose, in its broad meaning, that university social responsibility could be understood as the responsibility shared by universities in contributing to social betterment through the integration of social responsibility policies into institutional management, teaching, research, services and public activities. Consistent with the view of Vasilescu et al. (2010), our underlying rationale for USR is that, as corporations, universities should have corporate social responsibility, which we call university social responsibility. Furthermore, USR can renew the traditional mission of universities to improve human quality of life and address societal needs (Glass and Fitzgerald 2010; Herrera 2009; Watson et al. 2011).

## 2.3 The Need to Set Up a USR Network

The idea of USR does not only deserve further examination but also have to be implemented to create changes in real life. As such, there is an increasing interest in creating platform or infrastructure to help promote USR in an individual institution or as a coalition. For example, Spiru Haret University (Vasilescu et al. 2010) and the chapters presented in the present volume are examples of individual efforts at the institutional level. Nevertheless, to bring the impact of the individual efforts to a higher level, network or alliance should also be formed to promote USR. For example, there are a few strong regional networks focusing on specific countries, such as (e.g., Ma’an Arab University Alliance for Civic Engagement and the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum, Engagement Australia) (Hoyt and Hollister 2014).

Internationally, University Social Responsibility Alliance (now renamed Global University Social Responsibility Network) was set up in San Francisco in 2008 to

advocate for the idea that social responsibility has to be incorporated into the fundamental basis of all university education. As such, the global citizen with sense of responsibility can be developed. The members of the network, mainly from the Asian Pacific, North America, and Western Europe, includes business-related parties, international organizations, and governmental sectors, all of which share the same objective to promote social responsibility in higher education (Global University Social Responsibility Network 2016).

A closely related initiative, mainly derived from universities, was the formation of Talloires Network in 2005, which targeted international coordination and exchange at the senior management level of higher education (Hollister et al. 2012). As the largest international network focused on the community engagement of higher education, Talloires Network composed of 367 higher education institutions in 77 countries combined with an enrollment of over 6 million students. Their primary goal is “for the exchange of ideas and understandings (of community engagement in higher education) and for fostering collective action” (Hollister et al. 2012, p. 83). Watson et al. (2011) also have a nice summary of the information about other active higher education networks that focus on civic engagement.

Another important organization, The Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi), is an international network created in 1999 and supported by UNESCO, the United Nations University (UNU) and the Catalan Association of Public Universities (ACUP), which hosts the organization’s secretariat and presidency. GUNi’s mission is to strengthen the role of higher education in society contributing to the renewal of the visions and policies of higher education across the world under a vision of public service, relevance, and social responsibility. The network is currently composed of 209 members from 78 countries, and includes the UNESCO Chairs in Higher Education, higher education institutions, research centers and networks related to innovation and the social commitment of higher education (Global University Network for Innovation 2016). The GUNi book series on the social commitment of universities “Higher Education in the World” is also an invaluable resource of USR, providing both global and regional analysis of higher education in the world and delicate discussion on the key issues and challenges facing higher education in the 21st century. These collective efforts are important as they could facilitate the deeper exchange of knowledge and practice, and also raise greater awareness of the issue.

While these networks or organizations are conducive to the USR movement, they vary in number, size of membership and capability. In addition, the experiences from the Northern part of the globe and the western societies are still dominating the discourse and practice. Furthermore, the idea of USR is ambiguous and interchangeable with community engagement/action or social innovation, which requires further clarification and refined understanding.

## 2.4 USRN: A Global Initiative

In view of the world facing huge economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges, USR has not only become a central topic of discussion in the higher education sector but also appears to be a potential pathway towards the solution (Herrera 2009; Vasilescu et al. 2010). Furthermore, the expansion of higher education system and the rapid expansion of online educational offering provide a rare but timely opportunity for the university to influence the public life (Hoyt and Hollister 2014). Thus, USR, focusing on the alignment between educational practice in the universities and the societal needs are enormously and timely needed.

It is in such a context the University Social Responsibility Network (USRN) was established in 2015 based on the belief that universities have an obligation to work together to address these challenges and find solutions so as to make the world more just, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable. As compared to the large network, the size of USRN was kept small in the beginning stage to create uniqueness and strength of the network. The USRN places emphasis on collaboration, coalition, and networking among members and with other networks and alliances. It recognizes the importance of advancing USR in networks of co-responsibility that link each other and link with key stakeholders and the wider society. It is hoped that the network endeavors, together with other initiatives, can push forward the emerging trend of higher education sector, taking seriously the community needs as their core business.

There are several missions of the USRN. First, it provides a platform for the exchange of ideas, resources, policies, practices, problems and solutions to foster USR among the Network members. Second, it develops collaborative USR projects with varied scope and scale among the Network members. Finally, it steers and contributes to the global discussions and development of USR through networking and partnership within the Network, and with other networks and alliances.

In the establishment stage, fourteen universities joined the network as the founding members. They are (in alphabetical order), Beijing Normal University (China), Clare Hall, University of Cambridge (U.K.), Kyoto University (Japan), Peking University (China), Sichuan University (China), The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Hong Kong, China), The University of Manchester (U.K.), Tufts University (U.S.), University of Haifa (Israel), University of New South Wales (Australia), University of Pretoria (South Africa), University of Sao Paulo (Brazil), Washington University in St. Louis (U.S.), Yonsei University (Korea). Selection criteria for membership cover track record in USR, geographical location, commitment to USRN and institutional reputation in a country/region.

The Network's decision-making body is the Executive Committee, with representation from each of the founding members of the Network. The Committee is



tasked with setting strategic direction and providing development plans for the Network. The Secretariat is set up at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The Secretariat provides support to the work of the Committee and the Network, including creating and maintaining a website as the platform for collaboration and for members to exchange and disseminate information and views, and share best practices. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University is initially responsible for soliciting the fund needed for the operation of the Secretariat.

To generate impact and become hallmarks of the network, USRN is strategic and focuses on a selected few collaborative initiatives. In the initial phase, it was agreed that collaborations surround four major areas. The first area is joint research and publications. Collaboration on USR-related research in disaster management, and culture and design is proposed while the sharing of research results concerning student learning outcomes in community engagement with in USRN are being facilitated. This joint research is valuable as it could facilitate cross-country comparison and mutual learning, hopefully with the beneficial results in student learning. Furthermore, research on USR index is under discussion, which can help to promote the adoption of USR as a core mission of all universities in future. In addition to the joint research, a joint publication is also under preparation, while this edited book is an example of collaboration which will document the USR practices and case studies. This joint publication has potential to develop into a book series.

Besides research and publications, student programs and scholarships are being established. To facilitate stronger student programs, student exchange are being actively pursued among USRN member institutions. Students of USRN are encouraged to join hands in initiating projects to promote inter-cultural understanding, youth leadership, and community service. Furthermore, student community engagement programs (such as summer volunteer opportunities) are being made available to students of other member universities, while scholarships are provided to enable students of member institutions to participate in USR related activities among the network universities. What is more, we will set up Faculty Exchange & Visiting Fellowship program through which staff can learn from the host country's USR experiences. Currently, annual staff development program has been firmly established with visit and workshop organized by a member institution. Finally, to further promote USR globally, a USRN website was developed to provide an open platform for member institutions to share their experiences, research results, resources, and programs/projects/events related to USR. Also, USR Summit is being held every two years to facilitate further discussion and mutual learning.

## 2.5 Uniqueness and Challenges of USRN

Compared to the other alliances or networks with similar nature, USR has both common and unique features. Similar to the Talloires Network, USRN also targets the senior management of the university and solicit for their support. The representatives of the USRN founding members are mainly the key persons who are not only in charge of the associated USR practice in the school but also may play a strategic role or are in a position to mobilize the university practice (such as vice-presidents or chair person in the university council). As Hollister et al. (2012) note, in their experience, getting the support from the university leaders is critical in institutionalizing engagement.

Furthermore, USRN is global in nature. While many existing networks are targeting a specific country or are primarily US based (Hollister et al. 2012; Watson et al. 2011), USRN include members from the U.S., the U.K., Australia, Brazil, South Africa, Israel, Korea, Japan, China and Hong Kong. It is also expecting that several more universities will join the Network soon. Global presence and representation are important because it not only raises public awareness and displays the unifying force, but also demonstrates the collective effort and shows the collaboration to be real and viable.

USRN is unique in several aspects. First, the founding members of USRN have quite a strong commitment and track record in USR practice when they joined the network (please refer to the detailed examples provided throughout this volume). Instead of just paying the lips service or taking advantage of the benefits offered by joining those networks (e.g., recognition or eligibility for associated Prize), as observed by Hollister et al. (2012) in their Talloires Network experience, the rich and various experiences shared among the USRN members work as a source of inspiration for more consolidated work. Second, despite the fact that at the current stage USRN has relatively few members, the dynamic and interaction between the USRN members are favorable, if not optimal. As the network members have agreed, the key at this stage is not to increase the number of members, but to generate impact, which could underpin further collaboration in the future. Thus, small is beautiful at this stage.

Third, USRN is strategic and realistic. Instead of doing some common global project, which failed finally in Talloires experience (Hollister et al. 2012), USRN is wise to focus on a few collaborations. As Roussos and Fawcett (2000) highlight in their study, that the outcome of a project matters a lot in the coalition process as it could further boost human and financial support. Nevertheless, as the essence of USR is closely related the community itself, which varies in its cultural, economic and political situation, the USR practice across the globe will not be uniform. Therefore, instead of standardizing the USR practice or working on some highly ambitious and grand projects, the diversity of USR practice create many opportunities for research and learning. USRN, surrounding their works on research and

student and faculty learning (i.e., the four areas mentioned above), is making sense. Last but not least, the presence of China in the Network is worth noting. While the abovementioned network or other related higher education networks with a primary focus on civic engagement may involve South East Asia countries, the involvement of China is almost non-existent. As China is a country with rapidly expanding higher education, the lessons learned in this context will be valuable to the global community.

The use of network approach is with strengths and challenges, which we discuss below. Watson et al. (2011) highlight that global network could be an ideal platform for synergy and collective power. Hoyt and Hollister (2014) also argue that the power of network related to university civic engagement lies in the coalitions, which are “effective vehicles for the exchange of experience as well as capacity-building and collective voice in policy advocacy” (p. 132). For example, USR network could provide a “gateway to diverse experiences and knowledge that cut across cultural, political and economic boundaries.” (p. 228). This could nurture and facilitate innovation through sharing good practice and exchange of ideas. Hoyt and Hollister (2014) also highlight many innovative examples regarding the university engagement in the Global South from which the universities in western societies could learn (e.g., how to move forward the civic engagement initiatives with fewer resources or under the constraint by authoritarian regimes).

In terms of capacity building, the network could help build up local resources, such as broadening and encouraging partnerships with the local and regional funders. Furthermore, working collectively and as a unifying force, the network is more likely to influence the policy development, and thus enabling changes that would be difficult for a single institution to do alone. Therefore, we can say that the nowadays, network approach could be better-suited to handle and address complex issues facing society. This approach has already been commonly used in addressing community problems or health issues (Butterfoss et al. 1993; Roussos and Fawcett 2000; Wolff 2001a). We are also witnessing an increasing number of regional or global networks formed to promote the social responsibility and civic engagement of higher education (Hoyt and Hollister 2014).

Nevertheless, the network approach comes with challenges as well. First and foremost, financial sustainability is essential (Hoyt and Hollister 2014; Watson et al. 2011). While Watson et al. observe that the networks could receive funding from a variety of sources, including private foundations, government, investments by the initial host university, and international organizations, sustaining ongoing resources will be difficult. Second, Watson also raises the important role of the leadership and the associated challenge of inevitable change in the leadership in the network development process. Third, maintaining a shared vision is not easy. Watson noted that it is difficult to change the perceptions of faculty and community partners about the social role of the university. It is particularly apparent in the academic circle as the incentive structure for USR practice is minimum, if there are any. This may

pose a great challenge to keep the momentum for the socially responsible way of engaging the higher education in the society and as an engine for institutional change. Last but not least, relationship building among the network members, maintaining an effective platform for co-operation (in term of organizational structure and membership), technical assistance (e.g., administrative support and communication among members), and the broader environment (the societal readiness for USR) are all challenges facing various kinds of partnership and critical factors leading to the success of coalition (Butterfoss et al. 1993; Wolff 2001b).

## 2.6 The Way Forward

USRN is still in its spawning stage. As such, its mission and vision are to be realized and much more work needs to be done. There are several tasks ahead of us. First, the students' work could be further cultivated. Hollister et al. (2012) noticed that while they have done a good work to solicit support from the university leaders, not enough work had been done to build up a sustainable community of students. Thus, how to cultivate the next generation and translate the USR spirit from the senior level to students' level is critical. Good practices and experiences accumulated among the USRN members could be shared and would be a good start to develop further action. Besides, financial resources for USR initiatives are required, both in the institutional or network level had the ideal of USR be realized. Thus, helping line up or develop relationships with appropriate funders may be a potential pathway to success. Talloires Network had tried to raise the interest of several key funders, as a result providing critical financial support to some innovative local initiatives. Thus, documenting and publicizing the emerging impact of effective USR practices can help encourage the funders to understand how USR can be a promising investment opportunity (Hoyt and Hollister 2014) and may invite and expand new sources of funding.

Furthermore, systematic and rigorous evaluation of USR is enormously needed to demonstrate the impact of a higher level coordination at the policy level of higher education, despite the difficulty. The impact could be measured at multiple levels, including the student (e.g., students' civic awareness and engagement), faculty (e.g., staffs' engaged scholarship), institution (e.g., USR could become a key performance indicator in the University ranking game), and society (e.g., whether the USR practice of the university is related to the subjective well-being of people in the specific area). Last but not least, attention should also be paid to building an effective partnership. Though the success of USRN also depends on the broader environment (such as the community readiness for USR or government policy), facilitating an effective partnership and managing well all the nuts and bolts (e.g., having a clear vision and mission, supporting leadership, documentation and

ongoing feedback on progress, technical assistance and support, expansion of coalitions, as reflected in Butterfoss et al. 1993; Roussos and Fawcett 2000; Wolff 2001b) are certainly critical if we envision a larger and bigger change in the policy level. All in all, USR could be a timely response to the global society facing rapid change and challenge, but more collective work has to be done, collective voice has to be advocated and collective wisdom needs to be shared and learned through active partnership and exchange. This is what USRN aims to achieve.

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