

# The Practice of Social Responsibility at Polish Universities: A Study of Current Trends

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**Abstract:** Background: Multidimensionality, as well as the potential benefits of social responsibility of universities (SRU) described in the literature, prompts in-depth research into the actual implementation of this concept by universities. In Poland, it is only since 2017 that higher education institutions have started to declare the implementation of its principles.

**Research objectives:** The aim of this article is to present the results of research concerning the practical implementation of the idea of social responsibility at Polish HEIs. The literature review was supplemented with empirical research based on the analysis and evaluation of information on SRU available on HEIs' websites (random selection was used for this purpose). The research was conducted in the period July-September 2023.

**Research design and methods:** A review of the literature on the subject was supplemented with empirical research. The research was based on the analysis and evaluation of information on SRU available on the websites of higher education institutions. It was conducted in the period July-September 2023, and a random selection of institutions that had signed the *Declaration of Social Responsibility of Universities* between 2017 and 2022 was evaluated.

**Results:** The research resulted in a list of good practices, as well as recommendations for improvement measures for universities that have formally declared the implementation of SRU principles in practice.

**Conclusions:** Higher education stakeholders (internal and external), especially management, have a decisive influence on the practical implementation of the SRU concept. It is their awareness and determination that determines whether social responsibility will be developed in a real and tangible way by all university partners.

**Keywords:** university, social responsibility of the university, quality of education, university management

**JEL Codes:** I23, I25

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## Suggested citation:

Detyna, B. (2024). The practice of social responsibility at Polish universities: a study of current trends. *Social Entrepreneurship Review*, 2, 75–91. <https://doi.org/10.15678/SER.2024.2.05>

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the concept of social responsibility within the Polish education market (Pisz, 2009; Piasecka, 2015; Pędziwiatr, Czaplicka-Kotas, & Kulczycka, 2018; Vásquez-Torres & Tavizón-Salazar, 2021). This trend is evidenced, among other factors, by the increasing number of Polish higher education institutions (HEIs) signing the "Declaration of Social Responsibility of HEIs" since 2017 (MNiSW, 2017). By 2022, the group of signatories expanded by 77 additional HEIs, bringing the total to 160 public and private institutions. According to the website of the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, the prac-

tical implementation of the Declaration aims to “continuously strengthen the organizational and management capacities of higher education institutions by improving resource efficiency, developing academic staff, and building the prestige of the university as a generator of knowledge and creator of new ideas” (MNiSW, 2017). Universities in Poland voluntarily commit to promoting the principles of sustainable development and social responsibility through their study programs, research initiatives, and management and organizational solutions (Detyna, 2023, pp. 211–214). The implementation and development of social responsibility in universities (SRU) is actively supported by the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, which established a Working Group on Social Responsibility of Universities (WG for SRU) in 2018. This group, of which the author of this article is a member, develops annual Good Practice Catalogues in areas such as ESG (MEN, 2023) and practices related to the information and communication tools employed by universities. The WG for SRU’s primary role is to collaborate with the academic community to advance the social responsibility of Polish higher education institutions (HEIs) and to promote the principles of sustainable development as a foundation for higher education (MNiSW, 2017).

Members of the SRU WG (2022–2023) conducted research on good practices in social responsibility among foreign universities. Data for the analysis and evaluation were collected from the websites of 130 universities across 47 countries worldwide. A webinar organized by the SRU WG in May 2023 highlighted, among other findings, that communication is a key element in implementing the concept of social responsibility in universities. However, the research revealed that relatively few foreign universities report on SRU or ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) activities, either on their websites or social media platforms. Only 14% of the universities surveyed explicitly integrate SRU aspects into their vision and mission statements, while dedicated SRU strategies were identified in just 30% of respondents. Additionally, universities seldom provide information on their websites regarding the units or positions responsible for coordinating SRU activities. In summary, the research conducted in recent years points to a relatively low level of implementation of the SRU concept in universities. Key deficits include areas such as student and employee volunteering programs, for example, initiatives promoting healthy lifestyles (Detyna, 2023).

The main objective of this article is to present the results of research on the practical implementation of the concept of social responsibility in Polish universities. The literature review includes an analysis of published research findings on both Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the social responsibility of universities. To achieve this objective, empirical research was conducted, focusing on the analysis and evaluation of information about SRU available on university websites. A random selection method was applied, resulting in a sample of 39 out of 160 Polish universities that had signed the SRU Declaration. The research was carried out between July and September 2023. The article does not disclose the names of the surveyed universities, as consent for such disclosure was not obtained. The primary research tools included a control sheet and a qualitative analysis of the content published on the websites of the selected universities. The sample comprised public universities (84.60%) and private universities (15.49%).

## 2. Literature Review

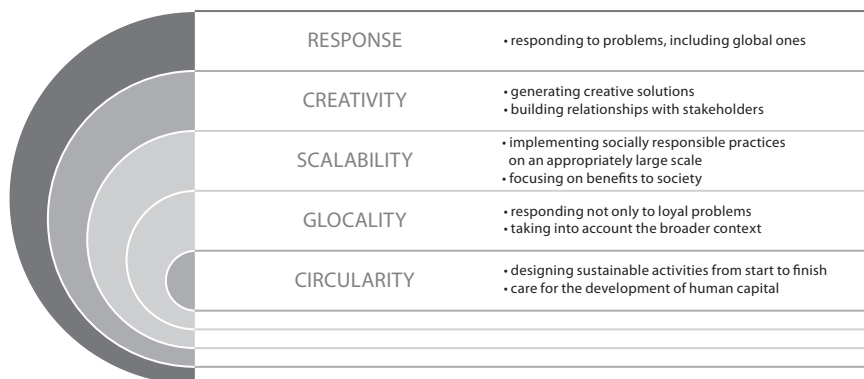
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is nowadays one of the key management concepts, according to which an organization should not only care about its own economic goals,

but also about achieving long-term goals for society (Gadomska-Lila, 2012, pp. 41–51; Barcik & Dziwiński, 2016, pp. 21–32; Płoszajski, 2017; Carayannis & Morawska-Jancelewicz, 2022, pp. 3445–3471; Gasparski, 2022). In the literature, CSR is most often referred to business organizations, but more and more often the concept is considered and presented in the context of the operating conditions of non-profit organizations, i.e., public administration units, hospitals or universities (Krodkiewska-Skoczylas & Żarlicka, 2015, pp. 277–295; Jakubiak, 2017, pp. 132–147; Buchta et al., 2018, pp. 22–33; Jastrzębska et al., 2019, pp. 285–297; Santos et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2021, p. 124931; Chumaceiro Hernandez et al., 2022, pp. 51–62; Huerta, Armas, & Sotelo, 2022; Barrera-Rodríguez et al., 2023, pp. 787–809; Vallaey & Álvarez-Rodríguez, 2022; Detyna, 2023, pp. 208–234; Hudson & Brandenberger, 2023).

An important milestone in popularizing the concept of social responsibility was the publication of H. R. Bowen's book, in which the author defined Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as the entrepreneur's commitment to policies, decisions, and courses of action that align with the goals and values deemed desirable by society (Bowen, 1953, p. 6). The concept was originally directed at the decisions of the entrepreneur himself, whereas it is now linked to the activities of the whole organization (Leoński, 2015, p. 93; Buczkowski et al., 2016; Drzazga, 2019; Bolibok, Kasprzak-Czelej, & Zinzuk, 2022). At the same time, the need for a total (comprehensive, multidimensional) implementation of CSR assumptions into all areas of an organization's functioning is indicated, emphasizing the importance of the environment, customers, employees and investors (Kowalska, 2009; Ebert & Griffin, 2013, pp. 64–65; Ławicka, 2016, pp. 207–220; Latif et al., 2021, pp. 815–829). This idea was summarized by B. Gajdzik, who described CSR as a comprehensive approach to thinking about business in all its aspects (Gajdzik, 2015, p. 16). Similarly, authors K. Davis and R. L. Bloomstrom highlight that CSR is a business concept grounded in the management's responsibility to make decisions and take actions that balance the pursuit of their own interests with the protection and enhancement of social welfare (Davis & Bloomstrom, 1975, p. 6). A socially responsible organization should, therefore, adhere to fundamental economic and legal standards, work to meet the needs of diverse stakeholders, contribute to environmental sustainability, and engage in morally and ethically justified activities. According to M. E. Porter and M. R. Kramer, a key prerequisite for implementing CSR within an organization is its ability to act as a responsible corporate citizen (Porter & Kramer, 2007, pp. 85–87).

A noteworthy model in terms of practical application is the so-called CSR 2.0 model, also referred to as the systemic concept of CSR (Figure 1). This model is founded on five key principles: responsiveness to societal issues, creativity in problem-solving, scalability of socially desirable solutions, globality (addressing both local and global challenges), and circularity (designing actions that are sustainable throughout the entire product or service life cycle) (Bachnik, 2011). The CSR 2.0 model shifts away from a purely philanthropic or PR-driven approach toward a more interactive framework that incorporates the voices and needs of stakeholders. Furthermore, this model emphasizes leveraging new technological advancements, such as social media, primarily as tools for dialogue and engagement. Building relationships and addressing the needs of diverse stakeholder groups are central to the CSR 2.0 approach (CSR 2.0, 2012).

According to the European Commission, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept through which organizations voluntarily integrate social and environmental concerns into their operations, engaging collaboratively with stakeholders. The sustainable success of an organization is built on ongoing dialogue with its environment, addressing aspects such as environmental protection and the development of social capital (Huang et al., 2014, pp. 68–84; Schaefer, Terlutter, & Diehl, 2019, pp. 1–20; Castro, 2022, pp. 48–55; Wirba, 2023; Fatima



**Figure 1. CSR 2.0 Model**

Source: own elaboration based on data sourced from Bachnik, 2011; CSR 2.0, 2012.

& Elbanna, 2023, pp. 105–121; Hahn et al., 2023, pp. 1–23). According to the PN-ISO 26 000 Standard (ISO 26 000, 2013; Encyklopedia ESG, n.d.), CSR is an organization's responsibility for the impact of its decisions and actions on society and the environment ensured by transparent and ethical behavior that contributes to sustainable development, including: well-being and health of society (Luty-Michalak & Kotowska-Wójcik, 2016; Cichowicz & Nowak, 2018, pp. 7–19), takes into account the expectations of stakeholders (Buglewicz, 2018; Wolak-Tuzimek, 2019), complies with applicable law and is consistent with international standards of conduct (Waliszewski, 2018), and is integrated into the organization's operations and practised in its relationships (Kotowska-Wójcik & Luty-Michalak, 2016; Khoo et al., 2023, pp. 716–763). According to the standard, the seven key areas of CSR include organizational governance, human rights, labor practices, the environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues, and community engagement and development (ISO 26 000, 2013; Krodkiewska-Skoczylas & Żarlicka, 2015, p. 280; Mef-tah Gerged et al., 2023). The World Business Council for Sustainable Development defines the social responsibility of an organization as an ongoing commitment to ethical behavior and contributing to sustainable economic development. This involves improving the quality of life for employees and their families, as well as enhancing the well-being of the local community and society as a whole (Zinczuk et al., 2020).

A common denominator in the various ways of defining Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the principle that any organization – regardless of its area of activity – should aim to be both pro-social and pro-environmental in its operations. It is worth emphasizing that socially responsible practices today encompass not only adherence to ethical standards in relationships with employees, competitors, and customers (in the case of universities, this includes students, employees, research institutions, etc.), but also increased investments in human resources, community development, and environmental protection (Hawken, 2007, pp. 210–221; Marek & Białasiewicz, 2011, pp. 98–99; Detyna, 2023, pp. 208–234). Well-executed CSR implies that managers are attuned to the issues impacting the lives of the people with whom they live and work and understand the societal conditions they influence, aiming to have a positive impact (Gustafson, 2007, pp. 191–192). In this context, university managers should consistently consider the social implications of their decisions, as these affect diverse societal groups, including stakeholders and the environment. Consequently, they must analyze, in a socially responsible

manner, not only the objectives – whether strategic, tactical, or operational – set by the university but also the methods employed to achieve these goals.

We can define the social responsibility of a university as a strategic and systemic approach to university management, fostering collaboration and dialogue with stakeholders that contributes to sustainable development, shaping the values and attitudes of civil society, promoting academic values and the creation of new ideas, and sustaining and developing scientific and teaching competencies that enhance business efficiency and innovation (MNIŚW, 2017). In this context, it is worth emphasizing that the principles of the SRU Declaration apply to all areas of the university's operations: teaching activities, research, internal organization, and engagement with all stakeholder groups (Detyna, 2018). The practical implementation of these principles should be reflected in the university's commitment to promoting sustainability and social responsibility through its educational programs, research initiatives, management, and organizational practices.

At this point, it is worth quoting the provisions of the SRU Declaration, which has been signed by Polish universities. Its preamble emphasizes the role of the university as a hub for creating and transmitting knowledge about the surrounding reality, incorporating and applying the principles of social responsibility across all areas of its activities, and promoting these principles among its stakeholders. The signatories of the SRU Declaration commit to the practical implementation of the principles of sustainable development, ensuring high-quality research and education, and fostering the comprehensive development of the academic community by undertaking the following:

1. Uphold the academic values outlined, among other sources, in the Code of Ethics for Academic Staff, particularly values such as conscientiousness, objectivity, independence, openness, and transparency (PAN, 2024).
2. Cultivate the social and civic attitudes of future elites, encouraging community building, creativity, openness, communication, social sensitivity, and a culture of professionalism.
3. Promote equality, diversity, tolerance, and the respect and protection of human rights within the academic community and its broader environment.
4. Expand curricula to include topics such as ethics, corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and social innovation.
5. Implement projects that apply the principles of social responsibility, particularly in areas such as diversity management in the workplace, employee volunteering, ethics promotion, intersectoral collaboration, and socially engaged marketing.
6. Undertake research and implementation projects, in partnership with other academic centers worldwide, the business sector, public administration, and non-governmental organizations, to address significant social challenges.
7. Foster inter-university, national, and international cooperation to adapt and reinforce best practices in university social responsibility.
8. Strengthen the organizational governance of universities by basing management practices on the principles of social responsibility, embedding these principles in strategic documents and related activities to support the comprehensive development of the academic community and effectively fulfill the university's mission.
9. Ensure transparency in the university's operations by, among other actions, measuring outcomes, promoting and disseminating results, and designating a person or team to coordinate these efforts.

10. Minimize the negative environmental impact of activities conducted by the academic community and its stakeholders in all dimensions.
11. Engage in dialogue with stakeholders to determine the priorities of the university's social responsibility policy and communicate the outcomes.
12. Adhere to principles of ethics and responsibility in teaching and research to create optimal conditions for stakeholders to benefit from the knowledge, intellectual capital, and achievements of the university (MNIŚW, 2017).

The importance and usefulness of such enshrined pro-social principles is evidenced by the relatively large number of SRU Declarations signed by Polish HEIs. This number accounts for approximately 45% of all higher education institutions operating in Poland. According to the Central Statistical Office, there were 359 of them in the 2022/2023 academic year.

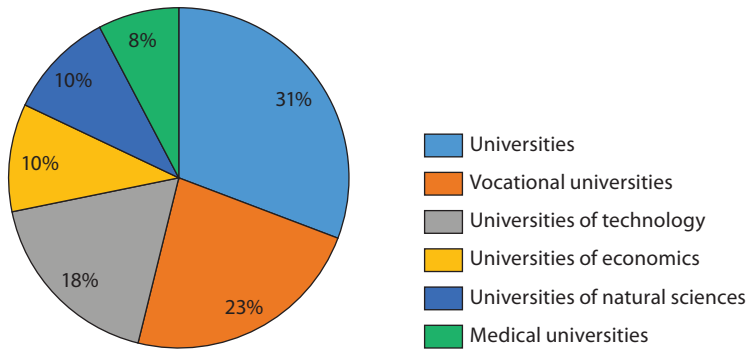
To summarize, the literature provides numerous definitions and references to the concept of social responsibility in relation to competitive value (Detyna, 2024b, pp. 65–83), management approaches, ethics (PAN, 2024), and the necessity for universities to address economic challenges, including labor market needs. Social responsibility is also linked to the creation of social relationships, innovation, quality of education (Grudowski & Lewandowski 2007; Wiśniewska & Grudowski, 2016; Tutko, 2016; Piasecka, Ludwiczak, & Tutko, 2021; Khan et al., 2022; Yeh et al., 2021), and initiatives supporting sustainable development (Detyna, 2023, pp. 208–214; Detyna, 2024c, pp. 65–72).

### 3. Research Method and Material

The practical implementation of the concept of social responsibility in Polish higher education institutions (HEIs) required the adoption of an appropriate research methodology. A literature review on the subject was complemented by empirical research. This research involved the analysis and evaluation of information about SRU available on the websites of HEIs. Conducted between July and September 2023, it focused on a randomly selected sample of institutions that had signed the Declaration of Social Responsibility of Universities between 2017 and 2022, totaling 39 universities out of 150 (24.37%). The article does not include a list of the surveyed universities, as their consent for disclosure was not obtained. The research group comprised both public (84.60%) and non-public (private – 15.49%) HEIs, including universities with scientific categories and those offering practical, vocational training profiles. In presenting the research findings, the author drew on her practical experience as the Rector's Plenipotentiary for Social Responsibility of HEIs and as a member of the Working Group on Social Responsibility of HEIs at the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy.

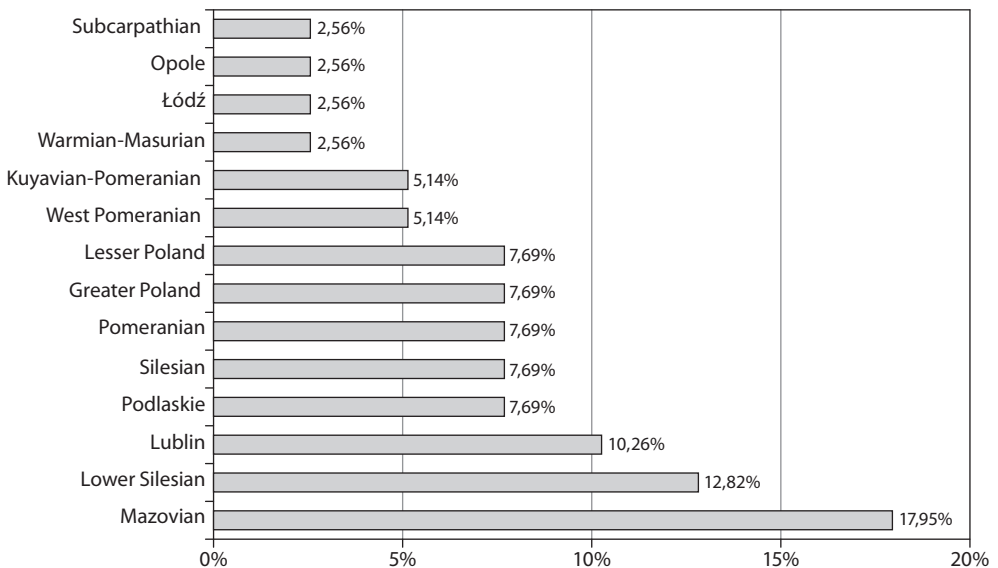
Figure 2 shows the structure of the surveyed universities by type (profile). The largest groups were universities (30.77%), vocational universities (23.08%) and universities of technology (17.95%). The surveyed universities also included universities of economics (10.25%), universities of natural sciences (10.25%) and medical universities (7.70%).

The survey encompassed 14 out of 16 provinces in Poland. The largest groups of surveyed universities were in three provinces, accounting for a total of 16 universities (41.03%): Mazovian (17.95% – 7 universities), Lower Silesian (12.82% – 5 universities), and Lublin (10.26% – 4 universities). In five additional provinces – Podlaskie, Silesian, Pomeranian, Greater Poland, and Lesser Poland – three universities were surveyed in each province, totaling 15 universities (38.46%). Each of these provinces represented 7.69% of the surveyed institutions. In the West Pomeranian (5.14%) and Kuyavian-Pomeranian (5.14%) provinces, two universities were included in



**Figure 2. Structure of the Surveyed Universities (%) According to the Type (Profile) of the University**

Source: own elaboration.



**Figure 3. Structure of the Surveyed Universities (%) according to the Location of the University (Voivodeship)**

Source: own elaboration.

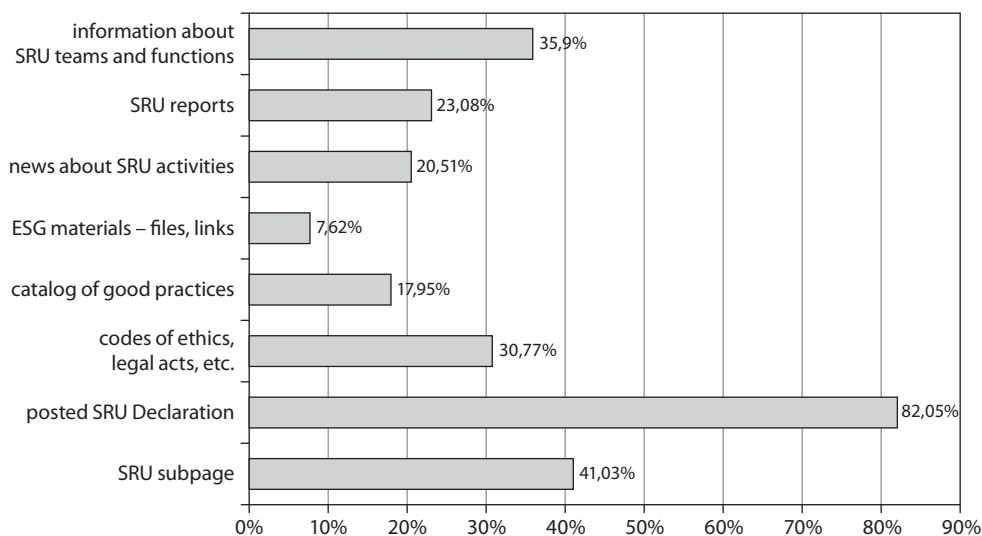
each. Meanwhile, four provinces – Warmian-Masurian, Łódź, Opole, and Subcarpathian – each contributed one university to the survey, amounting to a total of four universities (10.24%). The distribution of surveyed universities across the provinces is illustrated in Figure 3.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The empirical study reveals that the vast majority (82.05%) of the surveyed universities that signed the *Declaration of Social Responsibility of Universities* between 2017 and 2022 published

the full text of the Declaration, including all 12 principles, on their websites. Additionally, all universities indicated that they had signed the Declaration and confirmed its validity.

Figure 4 presents the survey results regarding the detailed information about the SRU concept available on university websites. A dedicated subpage highlighting activities related to SRU was identified in 41.03% of the surveyed universities. This finding suggests that for most of the surveyed institutions, the topic of social responsibility is not a significant aspect of their image communication.



**Figure 4. Information Posted on the Websites of Universities that Signed the SRU Declaration in 2017–2022 – Structure of the Surveyed Universities (%)**

Source: own elaboration.

On the websites of 35.90% of the universities, information was available about appointed proxies or groups/teams dedicated to SRU. However, it is unclear whether such functions or teams exist at the remaining institutions or if they exist but are simply not reported online. Only one in three universities (30.77%) provides easily accessible codes of ethics or legal documents introducing the concept of social responsibility, such as CSR areas, SRU principles, ESG goals, and similar guidelines, on their websites. Extremely rare, in the context of the survey conducted, were situations where codes of ethics (e.g., codes of ethics for students, for lecturers, for doctoral students, for students at the University of the Third Age, for the entire academic community) developed by the university were posted on the university's website. Such situations concerned about 12.82% of the surveyed institutions.

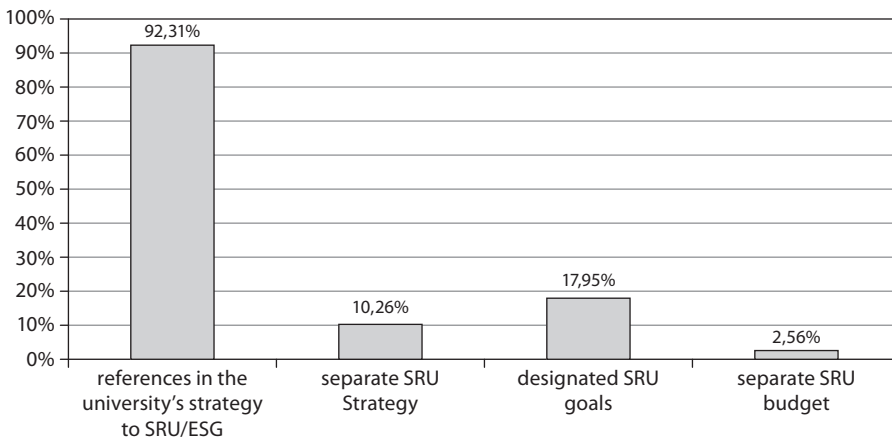
Despite the growing popularity of the SRU concept, only 23.08% of the surveyed universities publish studies in the form of reports on their websites. These reports most often focus on self-assessments of the process of implementing the SRU concept, typically based on forms provided by the SRU Working Group at the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy. Relatively few institutions, however, present detailed research findings in this area based on their own methodologies or solutions.



In one in four surveyed universities, information (news) on ongoing activities in the SRU areas – in the social, environmental and organizational governance areas – is posted on an ongoing basis.

For several years, the SRU Working Group has been developing *Catalogues of Good Practices* in the field of social responsibility and sustainable development policies implemented by Polish universities. These catalogues are available on the websites of only 17.95% of the surveyed universities, suggesting relatively low interest in these periodic studies (MEN, 2023). What is particularly concerning, in the context of the need to promote the SRU concept, is that only a small number of universities (7.69%) have materials related to CSR, SRU, ESG, and similar topics available on their websites. The few institutions that do provide such resources include files and links to legal acts, monographs, studies, reports, and examples of good practices from both Polish and foreign universities. By doing so, these universities contribute to the expansion and deepening of knowledge about the concepts and real-world practices of social responsibility.

The deficits in information provided on the surveyed universities' websites, as identified during the research, may come as a surprise given that the vast majority (92.31%) include references to SRU or ESG in their development strategies (Figure 5). Whether these references are direct or indirect, they clearly indicate that universities view the human (social) factor as crucial to their development and future. This conclusion is supported by the observation that university strategies place the strongest emphasis on the importance of communication and collaboration with all stakeholder groups, including students, employees, and representatives of the socio-economic environment, particularly at the local level.



**Figure 5. Information Posted on the Websites of Universities that Signed the SRU Declaration in 2017–2022 – Structure of the Surveyed Universities (%)**

Source: own elaboration.

Only 10.26% of the surveyed universities have developed and publicly shared an SRU development strategy on their websites. A slightly larger group (17.95%) outlines their social responsibility goals. A particularly unique activity identified during the survey is the preparation and publication of separate SRU budgets for the year, observed in just 2.56% of the institutions.

The research conducted allows for the presentation of a list of good practices that could inspire universities seeking to develop the SRU concept in a meaningful way. Among the activities recommended by the author are:

- Establishing interdisciplinary teams dedicated to SRU.
- Utilizing self-assessment (diagnosis) forms to evaluate the implementation of the SRU concept.
- Developing and implementing a distinct SRU strategy, including vision, values, principles, diagnosis, stakeholders, and strategic goals.
- Preparing SRU reports in both Polish and English and posting them on the university's website, preferably on a dedicated SRU subpage.
- Supporting and promoting scientific research and publications on social responsibility and sustainable development, such as creating an SRU "library" with links to research findings and publications.
- Incorporating subjects related to CSR, SRU, ESG, and similar topics into the curricula of all academic programs.
- Publishing legal acts and documents on the SRU subpage, including strategies, equality plans, regulations, SRU reports, and examples of good practices from various university departments and units.
- Drafting and publicly sharing a university-wide code of ethics, or separate codes tailored for students, employees, doctoral candidates, and other groups.
- Developing English-language versions of university websites, particularly those related to SRU activities.
- Promoting initiatives such as cooperation, integration, educational programs, health-promoting actions, and student and employee volunteering on the university's SRU subpage.
- Introducing participatory budgeting as a mechanism for co-management (participatory governance), which could include initiatives related to ecology and sustainable development, as well as an "employee budget" allowing employees to allocate specific funds annually.
- Organizing "issue meetings" to address topics such as the situation of older, pre-retired employees or non-academic staff.
- Creating a "volunteer map" (empathy map) of the university community, including students, employees, and external partners, using tools like online surveys to identify the scope and scale of academic involvement in volunteering and charitable activities.
- Collaborating on SRU initiatives with other universities and organizations in Poland and abroad, such as joining international forums like the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), participating in Global Compact programs, or implementing HR Excellence in Research standards for university workplaces.

Assuming that the SRU should address the needs of all stakeholder groups, it is important to emphasize that partner expectations generally fall into three broad categories of HEI functioning and impact (Duque et al., 2019; Martínez-Valdivia et al., 2020, p. 6179; Comoli et al., 2021, p. 124; Lytovchenko, 2021; El-Kassar et al., 2023). These categories typically include:

1. Social aspects, including ethical considerations.
2. Environmental concerns, emphasizing care for the natural environment.
3. Corporate governance, such as systemic solutions for organization and management within the HEI (Geryk, 2010, pp. 271–287; Merta-Staszczak et al., 2020; Nguyen Thi Khanh & Nguyen, 2022; Godonoga & Sporn, 2023, pp. 445–459).

In the light of the literature and empirical research, the positive effects of SRU are primarily reflected in university activities that are widespread and continuous, including:

- Adhering to the provisions of the *Code of Ethics for Academic Staff*, which emphasizes values such as conscientiousness, objectivity, independence, openness, and transparency (PAN, 2024).
- Investing in enhancements to the university environment, including improvements to infrastructure.
- Refining processes that positively impact the academic community, the local area, and the natural environment.
- Exploring and implementing more efficient and effective organizational and management approaches (Grudowski & Lewandowski, 2012; Detyna, 2017, pp. 33–48; Detyna, 2023, pp. 224–225).

Among the potential long-term benefits of implementing SRU principles – benefits that can serve as effective motivators for university managers – the author identifies the following:

- Enhanced integration of the academic community with external stakeholders, including the local community, through university-related activities.
- Strengthening the university's reputation as a socially responsible institution.
- Improved communication and engagement among students, staff, and collaborating stakeholders, fostering closer relationships, synergies, and the building of a cohesive academic community.
- Increased work efficiency through the improvement and rationalization of processes across all areas of the university.
- Attracting investment funds and external funding as a reflection of confidence in the university's social responsibility and performance.
- Deepening relationships with external stakeholders, expressed through joint projects, event organization, and investments in popular-scientific, cultural, sporting, charitable, and socially significant initiatives.
- Growing interest from prospective staff, increasing the university's attractiveness as an employer.
- Improved employee retention, reflecting the university's appeal as a workplace.
- Enhanced motivation and creativity among university staff through continuous stimulation and support.
- Reduced risk of litigation, promoting a more secure operational environment.
- Improved public image, resulting from better collaboration with stakeholders such as the local community and students.
- Positive media responses, which contribute to the construction and reinforcement of the university's public image.

Due to their long-term nature, the potential benefits listed require the consistent implementation of principles aligned with the SRU Declaration. The scope of these benefits may expand or contract depending on the actual activities undertaken by the university, rather than those merely stated as public relations objectives.

## 5. Conclusions

The research resulted in a list of good practices and recommendations for improvement activities for universities that have formally declared their commitment to implementing SRU

principles in practice. The publication highlights diverse approaches to defining the social responsibility of organizations, as well as various contexts and potential benefits of applying this concept in universities.

According to the author, the complexity and multifaceted nature of SRU should be carefully considered during both the design and implementation phases. All areas of a university's operations should be accounted for, including image communication and engagement with all stakeholder groups (Riad Shams & Belyaeva, 2019, pp. 423–436; Park, 2023, pp. 147–158; Rybak, 2021; Klein et al., 2021). Social responsibility in higher education institutions (HEIs) is reflected in activities that benefit all stakeholders, including students, employees, employers, and external partners (Bacoup et al., 2016; Hnatyszak, 2018; Schaefer, Terlutter, & Diehl, 2019, pp. 191–212; Cygonek, 2021; Reichel, Rudnicka, & Socha, 2023, pp. 263–275; Agustina et al., 2023, pp. 885–905; Detyna, 2024a, pp. 62–67).

Key to the success of SRU implementation is the continuous improvement of communication among stakeholders and the building of an integrated academic community around the university (Żemigala, 2020; Detyna, 2023). Successful implementation also requires effective communication from university management to all students, staff, and external stakeholders, demonstrating their commitment to embracing and developing SRU principles.

Another critical factor is integrating the SRU concept into key strategic documents, such as the university's vision, mission, development strategy, SRU strategy, and quality policy. Survey results indicate that most universities lack separate SRU strategies. Adopting systemic solutions, including an appropriate organizational structure tailored to the institution's needs, challenges, and opportunities, could prove highly beneficial.

The author also emphasizes the importance of developing a motivational system tailored to the individual needs of university employees. Such a system should stimulate commitment, creativity, and innovation in implementing and sustaining the SRU concept. Planning a policy for employee competence development – consulted with all relevant parties – is also advisable. This includes raising awareness of CSR, ESG, and related concepts, as well as enhancing social competences. The success of SRU implementation depends largely on the knowledge, motivation, and engagement of university employees.

Careful analysis of employee needs and the impact of proposed activities, such as training, on motivation and loyalty is recommended. For instance, the author proposes using a “map” of the university's responsibilities toward employees (Detyna, 2017, pp. 42–43). This “map” could outline various aspects under which specific actions may be proposed, such as:

- Employment conditions
- Health and safety
- Employee development
- Satisfaction and communication
- Involvement in organization and management
- Equal opportunities
- Work-life balance
- Employee volunteering

Activities implemented under these aspects, as part of the SRU concept, can positively impact many areas, including the quality of education, research, and collaboration with representatives of the socio-economic environment. The effectiveness of socially responsible activities may also be enhanced through oversight and initiatives led by specially appointed SRU teams or positions, such as plenipotentiaries, managers, or coordinators.

However, according to the research, cyclical SRU reports are rare at universities. Even when such reports exist, they often go unnoticed due to the lack of up-to-date information on university websites. This includes the absence of published audit results or evaluations of progress toward the stated goals. This lack of visibility is particularly concerning given that the universities voluntarily signed the SRU Declaration between 2017 and 2022. These institutions have a responsibility to keep all stakeholders informed about their socially responsible activities and the successes achieved.

To address the need for monitoring results within the SRU framework, the author recommends developing a scorecard or other reporting mechanism to track and communicate progress. Examples could include specialized survey forms, check sheets, or similar tools. It is crucial that these tools are utilized consistently and systematically to inform decision-making processes and ensure transparency in the university's social responsibility efforts.

In summary, effectively implementing and sustaining the Social Responsibility of Universities (SRU) concept requires tailoring it to the specific needs and capabilities of each institution. This includes considering stakeholder expectations and leveraging available resources such as human capital, knowledge, financial assets, and infrastructure. Communicating SRU initiatives through university websites and social media platforms is crucial for enhancing institutional image and transparency. However, research indicates that Polish universities have significant room for improvement in this area. Enhancing online communication of SRU efforts can lead to better stakeholder engagement and a stronger reputation for social responsibility.

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### Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure

Angelus Silesius University of Applied Sciences grant no. 22/GW/2024, "Społeczna odpowiedzialność w łańcuchu wartości uczelni / Social responsibility in the university value chain" (awarded for 2024–2026).

### Conflict of Interest

The author declares that the research took place without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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**Published by the Krakow University of Economics – Krakow, Poland**



**Ministry of Education and Science  
Republic of Poland**

The journal is co-financed in the years 2022-2024 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland in the framework of the ministerial programme "Development of Scientific Journals" (RCN) on the basis of agreement no. RCN/SP/0391/2021/1 concluded on December 9, 2022 and being in force until December 8, 2024.