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Formation of the Concept of a Socially Responsible University

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ABSTRACT

In the modern world, the role of universities is gradually changing: increasing importance is being placed on their participation in social life and engagement in socio-economic processes. The **aim of this study** is to substantiate the concept of a socially responsible university and to reveal the contemporary understanding of the phenomenon of social responsibility within educational institutions. The **methodological basis** of the research includes system analysis, the evaluation of regulatory documents, and expert data assessment. The study defines the concept of a socially responsible university and systematizes its practices in terms of addressing socially significant issues. It also describes various levels of university social responsibility, substantiates the principles of their activity, and uses an economic-mathematical model to summarize the resulting positive effects. Additionally, criteria for assessing the level of social responsibility of universities are considered. The research **findings** can be used by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation to classify universities based on their capacity to implement the concept of a socially responsible university. They may also be applied by university management to objectively assess the prerequisites for developing strategies aimed at creating conditions conducive to research and development activities.

Keywords: university; governance; socially responsible university; business ethics; social responsibility; loyalty

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, the importance of universities' participation in societal development is steadily increasing, particularly in terms of their engagement in socio-economic processes [1, 2].

As generators of innovation and developers of new technologies, higher education institutions represent a key driving force of the economy. They provide professional training for highly qualified specialists who are in demand on the labor market and ensure cooperation with industrial partners [3–5]. At present, universities face new challenges, including achieving technological leadership, ensuring import substitution, increasing the scale and quality of research activity, and accelerating the commercialization of its results [6–9].

The traditional model of a classical university no longer fully meets the demands of the modern era and requires transformation, one of the most effective directions of which is the development of a socially responsible university.

THE ESSENCE OF A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE UNIVERSITY

It appears appropriate to explore the potential for developing a new conceptual model of the university based on the practices of corporate social responsibility (CSR) of an economic entity, since the content of these practices is inherently oriented toward addressing the contemporary problems and challenges facing higher education institutions.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) (the terms “corporate responsibility” and “business social responsibility” are also sometimes used) is a concept according to which an organization takes into account the interests of society by “assuming responsibility for the impact of its activities on all stakeholders within the public sphere” [10]. In essence, an economic entity, “guided by the principles of corporate social responsibility, undertakes obligations in the course of its business activity that go beyond those established by legislation, and voluntarily adopts additional measures to improve the quality of life of its em-

ployees and their families, to address socially significant problems of local communities, and of society as a whole” [11].

The ideas of CSR began to be widely applied in the activities of business structures in the early 1970s, when business ethics started to develop as “a form of applied ethics that examines ethical principles and moral or ethical problems that may arise in a business environment” [12]. It should be noted that over time, under the influence of the scientific and technological revolution, the range of issues associated with corporate social responsibility has expanded significantly. Whereas in the twentieth century CSR primarily implied responsible labor and business practices, today it encompasses “the recognition of responsibility for environmental protection, addressing socio-economic challenges, improving the quality of life of local communities, ensuring human rights compliance, combating corruption, and a number of other issues whose importance is acknowledged by society¹” [12, 13].

The practical implementation of corporate social responsibility provisions in the economic activity of organizations remains a subject of debate. Some researchers argue that the adoption of CSR principles provides companies with economic benefits and competitive advantages (such as high customer and employee loyalty, increased market share, growth in revenue and profit, etc.), although these outcomes can be fully realized only in the long term. In this view, CSR-oriented activity is grounded in strong economic motivations [11, 14]. Other scholars contend that this is not always the case and define the primary purpose of CSR as the implementation of environmentally responsible business practices and the avoidance of violations of the rights of other stakeholders [12]. Under contemporary conditions, the challenges of integrating corporate social responsibility principles into business

¹ Business Social Responsibility. Monitoring. URL: <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/socialnaja-otvetstvennost-biznesa-monitoring> (date of access: 16.02.2024).

practice are becoming increasingly relevant and in demand.

Taking into account the key ideas of corporate social responsibility, a socially responsible university may be defined as a higher education institution that, within the framework of its core activities (training professionals and conducting research), is oriented toward making a voluntary contribution to societal development. This contribution is directly related to its primary mission and goes beyond the minimum requirements established by law, encompassing social, economic, political, spiritual, and environmental domains. The socially significant problems addressed by an educational institution may pertain to such areas as ethics, ecology, charity, humanitarianism, compassion, and others.

The concept of a socially responsible university implies that, in its activities, it undertakes additional obligations toward society, demonstrates concern for employees and their families, the environment, and the broader community as a whole [14–17].

AREAS OF SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE UNIVERSITY PRACTICES

Table 1 systematizes the areas of socially responsible practices of universities according to the spheres in which a synergistic effect arises when addressing socially significant problems of society.

The data presented in *Table 1* indicate that there are numerous spheres involving socially significant challenges in which universities may be effectively engaged. However, the key domain is scientific and technological development, as it is this sphere that can serve as a solid foundation for technological leadership. In all other areas, universities do not possess substantial competitive advantages over other economic actors, such as business organizations, public authorities, and institutions in healthcare, culture, or sport.

At present, the application of corporate social responsibility (CSR) principles in university activities appears particularly relevant. Previously, most universities, as state-funded institutions,

regarded their primary mission solely as fulfilling government mandates, namely the training of specialists and the conduct of fundamental research. At the same time, issues related to the effective utilization of their substantial material and technical infrastructure and highly qualified workforce were not given sufficient attention.

In Russia, the challenge of improving the efficiency of public sector institutions and organizations became especially acute after the 2008 crisis, when decisions aimed at the rational use of state and municipal resources were developed at all levels of government. The transition of institutions from the budgetary organizational and legal form to autonomous status may also be considered a step toward CSR-oriented development.

Given their significant resource base, universities are capable of operating under conditions of self-financing, thereby reducing the burden on the state budget. At the same time, the move toward autonomy may enable both the expansion of fee-based student enrollment in the short term (tactical horizon) and the development of research activities and enhancement of their effectiveness in the long term (strategic horizon).

LEVELS OF UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

As noted above, the university mission in its classical understanding was traditionally associated with training personnel for fundamental science and supporting its development. Under contemporary conditions, however, this perspective no longer corresponds to the demands of the modern era, as society increasingly requires the outcomes of applied research and innovative developments that can be integrated into socio-economic life.

The fundamental distinction between applied and basic research lies not only in the possibility of rapid returns and the production of new technologies and products, but also in the nature of research motivation. Fundamental research requires primarily internal incentives, whereas applied research depends on external drivers initiated by commissioning actors, including business

Table 1

Directions of Socially Responsible Practices of Universities

Nº	The scope of the emergence of a synergistic effect in solving socially significant problems of society	Characteristics of the direction of socially responsible practices of universities	Examples
1	Scientific and Technological Development (as the foundation of technological leadership)	• Accelerating the introduction of innovations into society; • Developing students' practical skills in science and technology; • Promoting science and public educational outreach; • Creating conditions for academic mobility; • Supporting university-based academic entrepreneurship	PTU МИРЭА: мегалаборатории HSE University: public lecture series and research in digital transformation and social policy; FEFU: free educational courses and mentoring system for school students preparing for academic competitions; MIPT: "StudFabLab" startup workshop; MTUCl: Research Laboratory NIL-24 "Cryptography and Protection of IP Systems"; RTU MIREA: mega-laboratories
2	Strengthening the Foundations of Russian Statehood	• Preserving traditional Russian spiritual and moral values; • Civic and patriotic education; • Strengthening unity within the student community	RSUH: systematic implementation of patriotic education projects, inclusive education, student self-governance; MGIK: promotion of Russian culture in Abkhazia
3	Volunteering	Engagement of students and staff in solving socially significant problems through volunteering, including: • Support for vulnerable individuals and those in need; • Promotion of compassion, humanitarianism, and social solidarity	EFU: university volunteer corps; USAAA: student-designed projects for seven social facilities (commissioned by the Sverdlovsk Regional Construction Authority); RUDN: veterinary assistance in Uzbekistan; RGSU: socialization of children with disabilities in Kyrgyzstan; RGAUU: veterinary support for cattle farming in India
4	Sport	Implementation of the principle "Sport as a Norm of Life," producing socially beneficial outcomes such as: • Strengthening the health of students and staff; • Promoting discipline and personal development; • Productive use of leisure time; • Opportunities for self-realization; • Popularization of sport (GTO programmes); • Organizing GTO norm assessment	GCOLIFK: "Sporting Vertical" project aimed at developing knowledge and practical skills among students in grades 5–9 in the field of physical education and sport, supporting their successful self-realization in athletic activities and various domains of sports practice. The All-Russian Olympiad "I Am a Professional" is conducted for university students across a wide range of academic disciplines; University-based GTO testing centers; universities awarding additional admission points for GTO badges
5	Health	• Research and development in the medical field; • Blood donation campaigns; • Psychological support initiatives	Lobachevsky State University of Nizhny Novgorod: development of the hardware "Active Longevity", based on a "smart-home" model for older adults, aimed at supporting daily living and monitoring health status through biofeedback methods; Demidov Yaroslavl State University: organization of a Mental Health Week for residents of the Yaroslavl Region, implemented by university students and faculty in cooperation with the Russian Academy of Education; Kosygin Russian State University: development by technology students of adaptive clothing sets designed to facilitate patients' rehabilitation periods; Ivanovo State Polytechnic University: creation by students of a device that significantly reduces injury risk among individuals with visual impairments

Table 1 (continued)

Nº	The scope of the emergence of a synergistic effect in solving socially significant problems of society	Characteristics of the direction of socially responsible practices of universities	Examples
6	Environmental Challenges	•Environmental projects (clean-up campaigns, waste separation, clothing recycling, etc.); •Environmental education and awareness-raising	FEFU: projects supporting Arctic and Far East development; TSU: "Green Campus" initiative and creation of eco-zones
7	Charity and Civic Engagement	•Support and participation in socially significant programmes aimed at protecting vulnerable groups and creating a favorable social and cultural environment; •Use of university infrastructure for public cultural, sports, business, and social events; •Free legal assistance to the population; •Organization of clubs and educational activities for children	FEFU: engagement with social start-ups; MSU: MSU Legal Clinic; RSUH: Legal Clinic Portal; MUIV: Center for Legal Assistance; Participation of Moscow universities in the "Moscow Longevity" programme; MSU: children's educational clubs (Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Biology); HSE University: youth engineering club within the national project "First in Science"

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Table 2

University Social responsibility Levels

Name of the level of social responsibility	Characteristics of the level of social responsibility	University models
Basic	The university's activities are focused solely on compliance with the requirements of regulatory legal acts (legislation) of the Russian Federation Training of specialists	Classical university model (oriented toward educational activity based on the results of fundamental research) [18]
Extended	The university's activities are aimed not only at compliance with the requirements of regulatory legal acts (legislation) of the Russian Federation, but also at implementing projects designed to improve employees' working conditions and develop effective competitive motivation programmes. University infrastructure is actively used to organize public events (cultural, sports, business, and social). Training of specialists in demand on the labor market. Integration with industrial partners	Pragmatic university model (oriented toward increasing entrepreneurial activity and strategic planning of institutional development) [19, 20].
Higher	The university is oriented toward active participation in addressing socially significant problems and implementing public programmes. University infrastructure is actively used to organize public events (cultural, sports, business, and social). The university: - conducts research and experimental development commissioned by society - trains specialists in accordance with future labor market needs, - and integrates education, science, and business	Socially responsible university model (characterized by the capacity to conduct large-scale research activity and to commercialize the results obtained through research). Lomonosov Moscow State University, Higher School of Economics

Source: Compiled by the authors.

companies, state and regional authorities, public organizations, consumers of educational services, and other stakeholders whose interests become central. Under such conditions, the priorities of the external commissioning party come to the forefront. It is evident that the implementation of applied research and innovation enables universities, on the one hand, to integrate into the economic and social life of the region and the country, and on the other hand, to secure additional funding.

Universities, like business organizations, are characterized by different levels of social responsibility: basic, advanced, and highest [10] (*Table 2*).

The main university models — classical, pragmatic, and socially responsible — are presented in *Figure*. They are positioned in different areas depending on the balance between the social and economic benefits generated through their activities.

The classical university model is generally regarded as one primarily oriented toward achieving economic benefits; the pragmatic model is characterized by a certain degree of social impact, whereas the socially responsible model is focused on generating outcomes that are significant from the perspective of society.

In *Figure*, the blue triangle highlights the area representing an optimal balance of social and

economic benefits that is attainable at the current stage of development.

The core mission of universities should be the achievement of the objectives set forth in the decrees of the President of the Russian Federation. However, the results attained by higher education institutions, which largely depend on their material and technical infrastructure and human resources, will vary.

Table 3 presents the capacities of educational organizations with different levels of social responsibility in terms of achieving the national development goals of the Russian Federation up to 2030, with a longer-term outlook extending to 2036.²

MODEL OF A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE UNIVERSITY

The results of the analysis of the operating principles of a socially responsible university are presented in *Table 4* [12].

The transition of universities to this model may generate the following positive effects:

1. Increased loyalty among prospective applicants, students, and their parents, creating

² Decree of the president of the Russian Federation dated 7 May 2024 № 309 “On the National Development Goals of the Russian Federation up to 2030 and for the Perspective up to 2036”. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/50542>

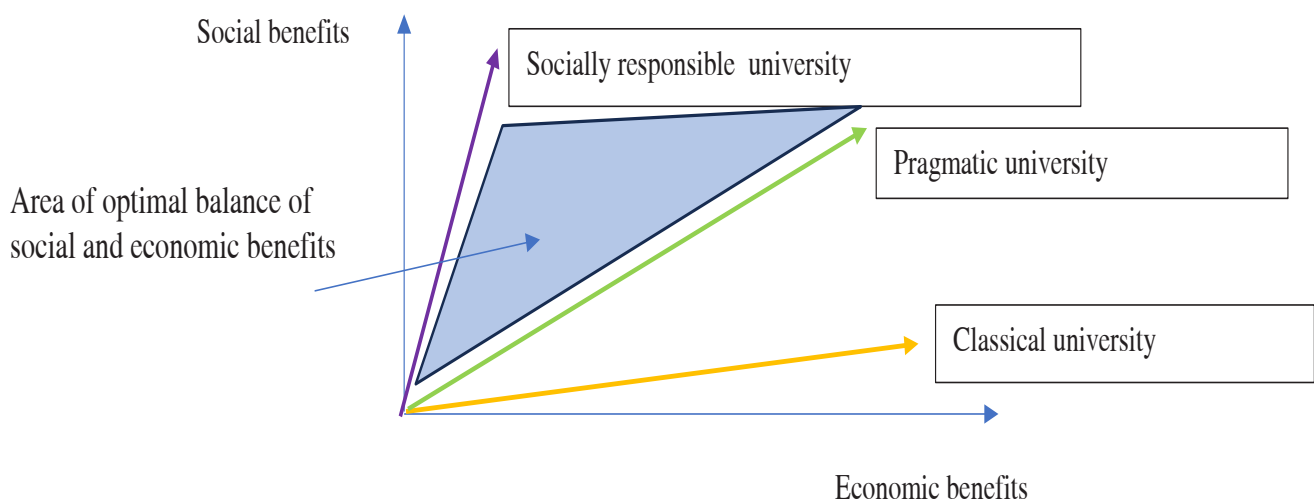


Fig. Basic University Models

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Table 3

University Capacity to Meet National Development Targets

National Development Goals of the Russian Federation	Level of social responsibility		
	Basic	Advanced	Higher
Population preservation, health strengthening, improvement of people's well-being, and family support	X	X	X
Realization of individual potential, development of talents, and fostering a patriotic and socially responsible personality	—	X	X
A comfortable and safe living environment	X	X	X
Environmental well-being	X	X	X
A sustainable and dynamic economy	—	X	X
Technological leadership	—	—	X
Digital transformation of state and municipal governance, the economy, and the social sphere	—	—	X

Source: Compiled by the authors.

conditions for expanding market share, increasing the volume of fee-based contractual services, and enhancing profitability.

2. Greater employee loyalty — the creation of attractive working conditions and opportunities for professional and career development will contribute to the retention of promising qualified personnel, strengthen staff motivation, and facilitate the recruitment of new specialists.

3. Commercialization of innovations — an understanding of stakeholder needs enables universities to offer products, services, and technologies that are in demand by society.

4. Opportunities to obtain support from the state and various foundations, as well as simplified access to investors, which promotes the growth of external funding sources.

5. Growth of intangible assets, strengthened brand reputation, the formation of a positive public image, and increased public trust, which in turn promotes the expansion of fee-based con-

tractual services and improves interaction with stakeholders.

6. The development of stakeholder relationships fosters a favorable environment that enhances institutional performance through a clearer understanding of the interests of all participants.

Under contemporary conditions, a sustained trend toward the implementation of corporate social responsibility principles is observed, making the issue of evaluating the effectiveness of this process increasingly relevant. In the case of business organizations, CSR levels are assessed using three quantitative indicators: the index of per-employee social investment; the ratio (share) of a company's social investments to sales volume; and the ratio (share) of social investments to total profit. "All three types of quantitative social investment indices are not standardized and may take any positive value. The higher the index, the greater the company's social activity" [10, 12, 14].

Table 4

Principles of Socially Responsible University

Nº	Principle	Content of the principle
Basic Principles		
1	Publicity and transparency	The university's activities should be clear, accessible, and public (to the greatest extent possible reflected in the media); information about the institution should be available to all stakeholders.
2	Reliability	The university's operations should be transparent and truthful.
3	Regularity (systematic approach)	The development and implementation of socially significant projects and programmes should be carried out on an ongoing basis.
4	Relevance and significance (social orientation)	Socially significant projects and programmes should correspond to the current needs of society.
5	Political neutrality	The university's activities and policies should not infringe upon the interests of any stakeholders.
Implementation Principles:		
6	Employee engagement	A key requirement of institutional operations is the maximum possible involvement of employees in achieving the university's goals and objectives (primarily through a KPI system), taking into account staff opinions.
7	Partnership	The establishment and development of relationships with industrial partners and public authorities.
8	Ethical conduct	A fundamental requirement of institutional operations is compliance with the norms of business and universal human ethics.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The first of three indicators (per-employee social investment index) reflects the qualitative dimension, whereas the other two represent the quantitative dimension, i.e., the scale. Moreover, analysis of the temporal dynamics of the second indicator (the ratio of social investments to sales volume) enables forecasting of its changes, since company turnover (sales volume) is always non-negative, and therefore the value of this index does not experience sharp fluctuations. Company profit, however, may take both positive and negative values; accordingly, the third indicator (the ratio of social investments to total profit) may be subject to substantial variation, which complicates its use for forecasting purposes. Therefore, only the second index — the ratio (share) of social

investments to sales volume — can be applied to characterize the quantitative dimension.

It is reasonable to adhere to this approach with respect to educational organizations as well, while taking into account the specific nature of their socially oriented activities, namely the priority of research and the rapid transfer of innovations from the scientific to the industrial sphere, primarily through the effective commercialization of the results of universities' core activities.

Table 5 presents the correspondence between CSR performance indicators for business organizations and universities.

The model of a socially responsible university may be based on the following factors:

Table 5

Methods of Corporate Social Responsibility Assessment of Business Structures and Educational Organizations

Corporate Social Responsibility Assessment Criteria	
in business organizations	in educational institutions
Index of social investment per employee	Average income from research activity per member of academic staff (rubles per person)
Share of a company's social investments relative to sales volume	Share of non-budgetary revenues in total research-related income

Source: Compiled by the authors.

- the volume of income from research activity, adjusted for the achieved level of social responsibility, serving as the *objective function*;
- the volume of non-budgetary revenues from research activity and the average research income per member of academic staff, serving as *explanatory variables*.

To construct an economic and mathematical model of a socially responsible university, the above data were used for ten universities under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation.³ These institutions were identified as leading performers in research activity in the ranking of the best universities in Russia compiled by the RAEX agency,⁴ for the period 2016–2022.

The model of a socially responsible university is presented as follows [21]:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} SR = SI_{R.A.}, \\ I_{R.A.} = 933563,2 + 0,646 X_1 + 128,3 X_2, \\ I_{NB} \geq 50\%, \\ I_Q > 1,15 \text{ normative value of the indicator} \end{array} \right. , \quad (1)$$

where:

SR denotes the volume of income from research activity adjusted for the achieved level of social responsibility;

³ University monitoring data from FGASNI "Sociocenter" URL: <https://sociocenter.info/>

⁴ URL: https://raex-rr.com/education/russian_universities/top-100_universities/2024/

S is a binary variable reflecting whether the university meets the requirements for implementing social practices;

$I_{R.A.}$ denotes the volume of income from research activity (rubles);

X_1 represents non-budgetary research income (rubles);

X_2 represents the average income from research activity per member of academic staff (rubles per person);

I_{NB} — denotes the share of non-budgetary revenues in total research-related income (%);

I_Q — represents research income per employee (rubles per person).

To strengthen the proposed model, the binary variable S , was introduced to reflect the university's compliance with requirements for implementing social practices: $S = 0$ corresponds to the basic (or lower) level of social responsibility, whereas $S = 1$, indicates an advanced (or higher) level.

The characteristics of university social responsibility levels are presented in Table 2.

Model quality assessment

Model quality assessment included the following results:

1) explanatory power — 86% (a good level, exceeding 70%);

2) p - statistics — acceptable for all variables (all values must be below 0.05);

3) t - statistics for testing the significance of each factor — acceptable values for all variables ($t_{crit} = 2,04$ — Student's t -test criterion);

- 4) correlation testing — good level
- 5) *F*- statistic — good level;
- 6) residual analysis was conducted graphically; for this model, the hypothesis of heteroskedasticity was rejected [21].

CONCLUSION

The article demonstrates that the previously applied classical university model no longer fully meets contemporary challenges and therefore requires transformation. It is shown that one of the most promising directions of such transformation is the development of a socially responsible university.

Taking into account the key ideas of corporate social responsibility, the authors define a socially responsible university as a higher education institution that, within the framework of its core activities (training professionals and conducting research), is oriented toward making a voluntary contribution to societal development. This contribution is directly related to its primary mission and goes beyond the minimum requirements established by law, encompassing social, economic, political, spiritual, and environmental domains. The study systematizes the areas of socially responsible university practices according to the spheres in

which a synergistic effect arises in addressing socially significant problems. It is substantiated that the sphere of scientific and technological development is of primary importance, as it can serve as a solid foundation for achieving technological leadership. Universities are characterized by different levels of social responsibility — basic, advanced, and highest — and the authors propose criteria for their assessment. The article also presents an economic and mathematical model of a socially responsible university, which enables evaluation of the positive effects associated with implementing this concept.

The findings of the study may be used by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation to systematize subordinate universities on the basis of the proposed economic and mathematical model, as well as in the development of state policy in the field of science and education. This may enhance the effectiveness and justification of managerial decisions. In addition, the results may be applied by higher education management for the objective evaluation of institutional development strategies oriented toward the prioritized advancement of research and development.

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