Repositório ISCTE-IUL

A self-assessment tool for Social Responsibility in Higher Education. Reporting on a national policy development process in Portugal.

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Abstract

Purpose – Providing higher education institutions (HEIs) with a tool for self-assessing their social responsibility (SR) that generates the information and knowledge necessary to a strategic approach to adopting the Green Paper recommendations about the SR of HEIs. Setting out the collaborative policy development process in order to construct the tool "Indicators of SR of HEIs" (ISRHEI).

Design/methodology/approach – After a literature review, including self-assessment (SA) tools and leading guidelines, a working group of 24 Portuguese HEIs was created to co-construct the ISRHEI tool, which was then subject to validation in a pilot study.

Findings – There are 34 indicators in the ISRHEI tool, structured by sequential levels according to the HEI alignment with SR (policies, procedures, practices and monitoring along a strategic continuum) hoping to achieve impacts on the organisational, educational, cognitive and social level.

Originality – This is an innovative and national policy development process for SR in Portugal. It gives insights into guiding documents, SA indicators for SR, and the process of developing consensus on this topic among 24 HEIs in Portugal. The ISRHEI tool is tailored to the specific characteristics and level of development of HEIs.

Keywords Social Responsibility, Higher Education Institutions, Performance Indicators, Self-assessment, Portugal, Policy Development

1. Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) perform a relevant role due to the ways in which they may contribute towards society through the development of Social Responsibility (SR), whether at the strategic or practical level, in terms of reflection and research on this topic as well as spanning the level of training and education in citizenship values.

The Observatory of HEIs SR (Portuguese acronym ORSIES hereafter) represents a collaborative network that fosters the social dimension of Portuguese HEIs and promotes the sharing of experiences and practices for SR in Higher Education (HE). ORSIES drafted the first Green Paper on SR and HEIs in Portugal, which reflects the debate with various stakeholders (ORSIES, 2018). The Book's structure reflects the triple mission of HEIs – teaching, researching and transferring knowledge (Law no. 62/2007) – and the conceptualisation of university social

responsibility (USR) in which universities generate impacts on governance, training, cognition and social participation (Vallaeys *et al.*, 2009).

HEIs thereby encountered the need to produce a self-diagnosis tool that would enable them to define and evaluate the implementation strategies for these recommendations and, simultaneously, to foster good practices and analyse the level of institutional commitment towards SR. The present paper focuses on the process of developing the Indicators of SR of HEIs (ISRHEI) in a self-assessment (SA) tool with the objective of setting out the development of an instrument for ascertaining the level of HEI commitment towards SR and sustainability. The ISRHEI strive to be representative of the experiences of Portuguese HEI members of the ORSIES as regards their exercising of SR, without overlooking the scope for its broader scale usage by other, national and international, HEIs.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Social Responsibility

The United Nations (UN) conference, ECO-92, introduced a new global level concern on sustainability, pointing to solutions that require new partnerships without jeopardising the full development of future generations (United Nations, 1992). This appeal generated strong impacts on HEIs in demanding they rethink their role in society and mobilise for sustainable development (SD).

The Green Paper "Promoting a European framework for the SR of companies" sought to launch a broader debate about corporate SR (CSR) at the national, European and international level (Commission of the European Communities, 2001). The strategy of the European Union (EU) for fostering CSR (Commission of the European Communities, 2002) includes the development of CSR management competences. This, therefore, draws attention to the importance of HEIs stimulating the SR of citizens and calling for dialogue with companies.

However, there was a certain inertia over the application of this strategy and only in 2011 was there the redefinition of the CSR concept that came to represent the responsibility of companies towards their impacts on society. This emerged within the framework of a new EU strategy for the 2011-2014 period (European Commission, 2011) that assumed the commitment to integrate CSR into education, training and research. This called on HEIs to incorporate CSR into their teaching and research programmes.

The Magna Charta Universitatum, renewed in 2020, highlights the major changes ongoing in the world and in universities that require academia to identify responsibilities and commitments vital to the 21st century. This convenes members of the academic community to undertake their alignment with the principles of SR (Wigmore-Alvarez and Ruiz-Lozano, 2012), through transparent and ethical strategies (Dima *et al.*, 2015) to generate trust in the institution and its leadership (Marulanda and Rojas, 2019). This requires a new vision from HEIs that is both strategic and proactive and interrelates with stakeholders (Massen *et al.*, 2019). This expects HEIs to get involved on the local scale without giving up on a global orientation and aligned with the UN Goals for SD set out in 2015 (GUNi, 2017). As agents of social change and transformation, HEIs should make their students aware of the importance of SR and sustainability, valuing the inclusion of such content in teaching and nurturing an orientation towards the future (Argento *et al.*, 2020).

The SR of HEIs benefits from the contribution of CSR (Wallace and Resch, 2017) and from the awareness on sustainability (Larrán Jorge *et al.*, 2015). This expects to identify positive impacts in order to leverage them while minimising and offsetting negative aspects. An SR

orientation implies adopting an integrated vision of the impacts of HEIs and thus requiring specific knowledge based on a holistic vision arising from a self-diagnosis process.

Nevertheless, both SR and sustainability act as moving targets (Zeisel, 2020), as goals for orientation but undergoing constant evolution. Dealing with moving targets demands specific competences for a systematic monitoring of the context prevailing, up-to-date self-knowledge about the organisational performance and the pre-empting of future needs. Osagie *et al*. (2014, p. 240) designate this "foresight thinking", the capacity to mentally construct scenarios about how SR related challenges are going to develop into the future and how these challenges may impact on the organisation.

2.2. HEIs as knowledge producers

A knowledge-based economy (European Council, 2000) presumes that HEIs acquire positions favourable to creating an innovation and knowledge-focused Europe. Unger and Polt (2017) highlight the idea of orchestration for the knowledge creation process, with the mobilisation of resources that generate added value and furthermore defend how innovation necessarily requires collaborative processes. Wallace and Resch (2017) approach HEIs as drivers of societal well-being reflecting the importance of the social dimension to HEIs, which requires new partnerships to solve wicked problems. It thus becomes evident that HEIs are crucial elements in the knowledge production process, however they must involve stakeholders in a collaborative way.

The community involvement takes place through the two core functions of HEIs, teaching and research (Jongbloed *et al*., 2008). Marulanda and Rojas (2019) refer to a third mission as the generator of value for the interested parties while remaining necessary to articulate this facet with the other missions. Ali *et al*. (2021) affirm that HEIs are required to undertake their responsibility for developing students, creating research and community outreach initiatives, and evolving in accordance with the concept of USR. Dentoni and Bitzer (2015) then propose a fourth mission that stipulates the coordination between HEIs and the private sector, civil society and government, as wicked problems need solutions negotiated among multiple groups, hence, multi-stakeholder cooperation.

Recently, various HEIs incorporated SR and sustainability into their management and teaching practices, ongoing research and outreach activities while with differentiated levels of development (Larrán Jorge *et al*., 2016; Aleixo *et al*., 2018). Diverse initiatives have brought about the adoption of declarations and commitments by HEIs on SR related issues (Lozano *et al.*, 2013).

In Europe, transnational projects have generated new knowledge (e.g., Dima *et al.*, 2015) and fostered awareness among the academic community. In Portugal, leading initiatives include the setting up of ORSIES and the drafting of the Green Paper on SR and HEIs (ORSIES, 2018) as a driver and a benchmark for the integration of SR into HEIs.

2.3. Social Responsibility models for Higher Education

The concept of SD in HE became even more pertinent with the UN Decade of Education for SD, the Conference Committing University to SD and the 2009 World Conference on HE (UNESCO, 2009). Furthermore, between 2000 and 2015, the publication of papers on SR in scientific journals specialized in HE varied between 0.9% and 14.86% (Larrán Jorge and Peña, 2017). While the literature on HEIs is disparate, there has been a greater production of knowledge around sustainability, when compared to SR, in recent years.

The concept of USR has undergone debate, especially in Latin America (Ribeiro and Magalhães, 2014) and relates to the commitment of universities to development for human promotion, overcoming social problems, constructing values and ethical principles and building more equal and democratic societies. Examples include a consortium of universities in Chile "Universidad Construye País" (Gaete, 2011). Issue 36 of Estudos (Brasil) held the objective of stimulating the discussion about ethics and USR. Within this framework, Vallaeys (2006) presents four lines of USR action. Later, Vallaeys *et al.* (2009) proposed a model around four impacts: organisational, educational, cognitive and social. While the first and fourth impacts are common to any organisation, the educational and cognitive impacts are specific and differentiate HEIs as organisations (Fernandes and Fonseca, 2020).

In Europe, the EU-USR project (Dima *et al*., 2015) presents a framework for USR, proposing four standards: research, teaching, support for learning and public engagement; governance; social and environmental sustainability; and fair practices.

Both in Latin America and Europe, USR incorporates the four dimensions or standards for HEIs and a commitment to managing their impacts.

Gaete (2011) stresses three approaches to the concept of USR – on management (production of USR reports based on the directives stipulated by the Global Reporting Initiative – GRI), transformative (classification of different initiatives across four areas: training, research, social leadership and social commitment) and normative (as proposed by the UN Global Compact – Principles for Responsible Management Education, with its principles especially formulated for HEIs) and defines USR as the obligation of university managers to promote university policies, take decisions or implement lines of actions that are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of the surrounding society. The relationship between the perspectives on USR (Gaete, 2011) resides in how the transformative aspect establishes the key directives for socially responsible behaviours for university work (the what), while the management and the normative facets set out the ways in which universities are to express these behaviours (the how), oriented within the scope of the guidelines set for SR at the conceptual level: transparency and participation.

The common aspects of these models enables the structuring of the USR around four axes: the socially responsible campus, professional and citizenship training, social management of knowledge and social participation, highlighting how USR has to involve an integrated governance model, in which the transversal aspects of HEI management and its relationship with different stakeholders require democratic, transparent and responsible leadership, incorporating SR into HEI strategic planning in Portugal (ORSIES, 2018).

Modelling the impacts returns a holistic perspective on the scope of HEI actions, identifying positive and negative results. This enables the pre-empting of action scenarios, dilemmas that may emerge and elicit recommendations for actions appropriate to overcoming these challenges.

2.4 Commitment to USR

When Portuguese HEIs assume their commitment to SR, the resulting evidence should feature the inclusion of SR in their strategic documents. This is necessary to convey the awareness that the impacts of all their actions are subject to consideration.

Vallaeys *et al*. (2009) put forward a methodology that proposes the integration of SR into the strategic reflection of HEIs and providing a trajectory that unfurls over the course of time. The four stages to this methodology are: commitment, self-diagnosis, compliance and

management reporting. This methodology describes a never-ending process but one in which each stage seeks to deepen the HEI commitment to SR (Vallaeys *et al.,* 2009). According to Dima et al. (2015), the stages to implement USR policies and practices are knowing, raising awareness and convincing, and committing and getting involved. Commitment is essential in both proposals, but also the need to know by making a diagnosis.

SR in HE requires a long-term commitment that generates repercussions for the mission and objectives, procedures, annual reports and the various other HEI decision-making processes (Wigmore-Álvarez and Ruiz-Lozan, 2012). For any USR strategy, the key barrier is the lack of financial resources while the main facilitator arises from the involvement of all stakeholders (Dima *et al.*, 2015).

Wallace and Resch (2017) detail how the key principles in the USR promotion process are the top-to-bottom management model, not reducing USR to an administrative unit, perceiving and evaluating the impacts produced by the HEIs, prioritising specific dimensions of USR, the dialogue with stakeholders and the transparency and evaluation of the results of this dialogue.

Larrán Jorge and Peña (2017) conclude that despite the changes taking place as regards the social dimension of universities, there still remains a long path ahead for USR, especially in terms of incorporating the SR principles in their core areas – education, research, management and community involvement. They also propose solutions for overcoming some of these barriers, for example, developing a tool for measuring and reporting SR, university training programmes and approaches to involve a diversity of stakeholders. This paper seeks to demonstrate how these solutions can be operationalized.

2.5 HEI/stakeholder interactions and accountability reporting

HEIs review their relationships with stakeholders, with the importance placed on mapping them to achieve mutual commitment (Dima *et al.*, 2015). Such processes are collaborative and beneficial to both parties and are thus sustained to bring about continuous improvement (Osagie *et al.,* 2014). Classifying stakeholders is urgent as HEI´s management model requires them to adopt quasi-commercial management practices (Langrafe *et al.,* 2010).

The concept of stakeholder expresses the idea of an organisation acting in networks, that it draws upon governance characterised by interconnections and interdependencies and clarifies how the relationship between HEIs and society occurs within an interface context and through a broad scrutiny (Jongbloed *et al.,* 2008).

Mohamed (2015) sets out a structure for USR and Sustainability that integrates SR into the strategic management, drafting of policies, undertaking of actions, evaluating services and the development of social collaboration with stakeholders for meeting the current and future needs of the surrounding environment. The structure makes the connection between the different internal and external stakeholders, deploying communication tools and reporting.

Nevertheless, such reporting is not reducible to its communication function and requires understanding as a dynamic instrument for planning the intended changes (Celeumans *et al.*, 2015). Blasco *et al.* (2019) interrelate the integrated evaluation of the economic, social and environmental impacts to the performance of HEIs but Lozano *et al*. (2015) demonstrate that there is no such approach to sustainability. Therefore, integration still emerges as a target for achieving: "Today, more than ever, full accountability is an obligation for HEIs" (GUNi, 2017, p. 515).

While distinct, the practices for reporting and accounting and those for SA are complementary with the latter preceding the former in order to benefit from the information and knowledge returned by the self-evaluation process. Thus, HEIs need to acquire the tools capable of

boosting their capacity for monitoring, which should be flexible and adaptable to the multiple organisational realities while sufficiently robust to justify a development plan and an orientation towards targets able to mobilise stakeholders.

These instruments are core criteria for improving the quality of HE within a context of globalisation and bringing about a broad evaluation of the institution (Berzina *et al.,* 2017), while demonstrating a willingness to better understand each other and provide more information and knowledge. From the identification of the strengths and weaknesses, the pre-empting of opportunities and threats, the organisation becomes empowered for strategic planning. This enables a broader awareness of the organisation, sets down a path for continuous improvement (Berzina *et al.,* 2017) and presents a diagnosis for organisational solutions.

The performance of SA for the purposes of reporting requires understanding as a learning experience, transversal to the different stakeholders, the didactic concept that results in gaining attention, focus and the sharing of knowledge among the HEI's members, acting as a driver contributing to change (Celeumans *et al.*, 2015). Rahman *et al.* (2019) suggest that SA processes should be a systematic practice driving the capacity to monitor the evolution and to map the challenges needing consideration, which explains the importance of SR reporting in terms of its institutionalisation.

2.6. Portuguese HEIs commitment to SR

The proposal for SR indicators for Portuguese HEIs followed the Green Paper (ORSIES, 2018). This presents recommendations to achieve the commitment to SR and sustainability and the ISRHEI representing a SA grid to orient the HEIs in their operational implementation. Measuring and assessing the performance of HEIs across the economic, social and environmental facets, in an integrated way, constitutes a complex and challenging process. Thus, this paper sets this challenge by addressing the research questions: How to measure and evaluate SR in HEIs? What tool to use or how to create this tool?

The ISRHEI tool provides the desired response for the need to promote SR in Portuguese HEIs, analysing, communicating and interconnecting all stakeholders and reporting the impacts of their actions: organisational impacts (the organisational performance and the responsible ways in which HEIs manage their processes, based upon democratic and ethical practices, respect for human rights, valuing labour relationships and environment sustainability), educational impacts (the commitment of HEIs to educate socially responsible citizens), cognitive impacts (that the research undertaken, developed and disseminated by HEIs, articulates the principles of open science, trans-disciplinarity and community involvement), and social impacts (the relationship with the surrounding community provides processes for SD and social transformation).

3. Policy development process: Developing the ISRHEI in Portugal

The methodology used in the ISRHEI development process is participatory action research. The development process of the ISRHEI tool began after the publication of the Green Paper (ORSIES, 2018) at the request of Portuguese HEIs. A working group was then established with members from 24 HEIs who worked together for two years. ISRHEI is, therefore, the result of a collaborative process. Co-construction was developed around sessions to build a consensus where all the parties see themselves in the joint solution.

3.1 Reference documents

Developing the ISRHEI took into account the following assumptions:

- Performance indicators stem from a holistic vision of HEIs and the impacts they generate (Vallaeys *et al.*, 2009), integrating the three dimensions to sustainability in a balanced approach guided by ethical and transparent practices (Dima *et al.*, 2015).
- Implementation of SA provides a learning experience for HEIs (Celeumans *et al.*, 2015) and underpins deep reaching self-knowledge.
- Process of SR self-assessment requires tailoring to serve the purpose, taking into consideration the distinctive characteristics of HEIs. Wallace and Resch (2017) recommend the adaptation of the GRI indicators to obtain a more precise portrait of the impacts of HEIs. Lozano (2006) introduces the Education dimension to GRI within the scope of proposing the tool – the Graphical Assessment of Sustainability in Universities (GASU).
- SA should be periodical in order to endow HEIs with updated information. As a dynamic process, the SA enables organisational change, creating the opportunities to foster internal communication and contributing to clarifying the positioning of HEIs (Celeumans *et al.*, 2015).
- Results of SA processes should consolidate a strategic vision of SR for HEIs, common and shared understanding of what is SR and what this requires. Aleixo *et al.* (2018) refer to sustainability as more than a collection of diverse projects. Celeumans *et al.* (2015) highlight the capacity to generate greater internal involvement, a deeper understanding and greater openness to SD in those HEIs that produce reports on sustainability.
- Success of any SR self-assessment process depends on the involvement of the HEI leadership. Larrán Jorge *et al.* (2016) conclude that the absence of this top-down orientation is a barrier to the sustainability of HEIs.

Additionally, the core guidelines for a commitment to sustainability and/or SR in HEIs were identified. The framework for the ISRHEI fulfils two purposes: designing a strategic vision and drafting a specific assessment tool. For the first, the UN Global Compact sets out the main goals of socially responsible actions towards sustainability; the UN 2030 Agenda aligns HEIs with the main and global concerns for the world's transformation; and the Guiding principles on Business and Human Rights guarantee that these rights are fully respected by HEIs. For the second, GRI Indicators are a reference pattern for reporting and balancing the three pillars of SD; the ISO 26000 proposes a holistic perspective for HEIs/stakeholders involvement; and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European HEIs allow the alignment of SR/sustainability with internal quality assurance systems. Guidance by recognized and global references aligns the Portuguese tool with the purposes of SR and SD and facilitates its adoption by foreign HEIs.

The construction of the ISRHEI tool adopted the structure and organisation of the indicators put forward by the Ethos Institute of Sustainable and Responsible Business (2017/18) following their adaptation to the specific characteristics of HE and the ORSIES objectives. Four advantages to the Ethos Institute proposal were identified:

(1) Organisation into indicators: Lozano (2006) defends that opting for performance indicators generally guarantees the best results as they are both measurable and comparable and thus producing objective results.

(2) Aggregation of indicators by themes and dimensions in accordance with an integrated perspective on sustainability and/or SR and thereby reflecting the interdependent characteristics of organisations acting in networks (Jongbloed *et al.*, 2008).

(3) Structured by levels and that reflects an evolutionary process, a particularly useful option when SR in HEIs still remains at an initial phase (Goméz *et al.*, 2015), as is the case with the Portuguese context (Aleixo *et al.*, 2018).

(4) Tool that facilitates the comparison of performance levels within a logic of mutual enrichment and the sharing of experiences.

3.2. Participants in the development process

Out of the total HEIs belonging to ORSIES, 24 public and private HEIs signed up to the Working Group (WG) for establishing the ISRHEI tool. Of these, the majority are polytechnic institutes (n=15) and public HEIs (n=16).

The representation of the HEIs at the WG sessions included both faculty and non-teaching staff members, and also representatives from the management level. Students were integrated into one session.

3.3. Co-construction procedure for the ISRHEI tool

The working methodology was based on the sharing of good practices and joint reflection on the guidelines for this process in a consensus-based approach towards the co-construction of the ISRHEI tool.

This collaborative model was essential to the voluntary implementation of the tool and to the shared reflection on each of the barriers thereby encountered in the Indicator's contents. This procedure involved participation in six WG sessions:

(1) In the first, the 23 participants defined the WG targets and objectives, the model, the co-creation process of the ISRHEI, and the chronogram, using a cooperative and collaborative work methodology.

(2) In the second, the participants (n=35) established an interrelationship among the four types of impact generated by HEIs (Vallaeys *et al.*, 2009) and the Green Paper chapters (ORSIES, 2018), and approved the structure of the ISRHEI. The methodologies used were explanation, discussion in small groups, and debate in a large group.

(3) Establishing an interrelationship among the Green Paper recommendations (ORSIES, 2018) and the Ethos Indicators was the objective of the third meeting (n=22). This deployed the same methodologies as in the second session.

(4) In the fourth, the 19 participants analysed the first ISRHEI draft, by cooperative and collaborative work methodology.

(5) The analysis of the second ISRHEI draft, applying the *World Café* dynamic, gathered 17 participants, which included 10 students from different HEIs. After this session, a pilot study was conducted to pre-test the ISRHEI.

(6) In the last session, the 21 participants analysed the pilot study results: the current situation of the process, difficulties encountered, determinants for the success of SA, and next steps for improving the ISRHEI tool. This used a cooperative and collaborative work methodology.

The diversity in the perspectives and the collaboration established are both the strengths and benefits of the co-creation model that underwent implementation. The different methodologies used in the WG sessions also facilitate an identification of the model underlying the Indicators and a greater understanding of its relevance.

3.4 The instrument

The self-assessment ISRHEI tool thus contains indicators grouped into themes, themes grouped into four dimensions, highlighting the articulation between dimension, theme and indicator.

The structure of each indicator incorporates a set of statements organised into a sequence of levels oriented towards the integration of SR into the policies, procedures, practices and monitoring of HEIs. With the scope for binary answers (Yes/No) as well as "Does not apply", each option requires the identification of data/evidence.

Some indicators provide quantitative measurements to facilitate their monitoring.

3.5 Pilot study

The initial version of the tool incorporated 46 indicators. Next, a pilot study was applied to test and validate this version, with two goals: i. undertaking a pre-testing of the indicators – ease of application, understanding of the structure and validation of the contents; ii. gathering information about the facilitators and obstacles to implementing self-evaluation – organisation of compliance teams, strategies applied for completion and the involvement of senior leadership.

Out of the total HEIs belonging to the WG, 13 took part in the pilot study. Of these, the majority are polytechnic institutes (n=8) and public HEIs (n=8).

The pilot study took place between September 2019 and March 2020. A WG session (sixth session detailed above) took place for the presentation of the results, highlighting the lessons learned from the pilot study before discussing the final proposal for the ISRHEI tool.

4. Results

4.1 Pilot study

According to the goals of the pilot study, the results identified how HEIs applied different methodologies to complete the initial version of the ISRHEI, whether focusing on a team attributed responsibility or integrating all relevant departments. In itself, this option, to a greater or lesser extent, impacted on the scope of the treatment and dissemination of the collected information. Some HEIs warned of the excessive size of the ISRHEI's initial version - 46 indicators - as well as an imbalance in the distribution of indicators by dimension. Two specific difficulties were mentioned: firstly, in identifying evidence and secondly, in answering the sequential level statements for each indicator. The binary response was perceived as overly reductive. The HEIs suggested a user manual and an online platform for completing the tool should be made available.

Regarding the obstacles to the use of the ISRHEI's initial version, difficulties in getting the different stakeholders involved and the lack of articulation with the management bodies were emphasized. As facilitators of the process, the importance of a fixed schedule that ensures periodicity was highlighted as well as ensuring the dissemination of results and the subsequent formalization of commitments by the management bodies. This also valued the student involvement in SR teams.

4.2 Final tool

In accordance with the results of the pilot study, a set of changes was integrated into the final version of the ISRHEI tool:

- Reviewing and reorganising the indicators: cut from 46 to 34 indicators without losing information.

- Reviewing the methodology for completing the levels to facilitate a sequential approach.
- Highlighting the grouping of indicators relating to the specific impacts of HEIs: educational and cognitive.
- Highlighting the importance of how data enables institutional registration.
- Beyond the binary answers, the "Does not apply" response, requires justification in the final version.
- Defining an annual application process and the respective scheduling.
- Distributing a user manual and launching an IT platform to manage automatic reporting.

Table I details the main characteristics of the final version of the self-assessment ISRHEI tool, organised according to the proposal by Du *et al.* (2020).

[Insert Table I. here]

The 34 indicators of the self-assessment ISRHEI tool are distributed across 14 themes and grouped into four dimensions in accordance with Table II. The definition of the themes resulted from the Green Paper recommendations (ORSIES, 2018) and presents the impacts generated by HEIs around four dimensions (Vallaeys *et al.*, 2009). The breakdown of the themes into 34 indicators is also a result of the aforementioned Green Paper and the Indicators of the Ethos Institute. The latter are linked to the UN Global Compact, GRI Indicators and ISO 26000, which guarantees the inclusion of items relevant to SR and SD and adapted to the sphere of action in HE.

[Insert Table II. here]

Table III illustrates the sequence of the four levels, with the respective statements, of one indicator.

[Insert Table III. here]

Finally, publishing the ISRHEI tool (Fernandes and Fonseca, 2020) sets out the shared understanding and co-construction of SR by the HEIs participating in ORSIES. This shared vision represents one of the factors for success of the ISRHEI tool and an important stage in generating an institutional culture oriented towards SR based on the practice of SA. As a result of the SA tool developed from a consensus between HEIs, it's guaranteed that the indicators are relevant and significant; this also applies upstream of training and HEI accreditation processes; the preparation of sustainability reports; and also in the review and improvement of internal quality assurance systems. These are the main results achieved by ISHREI insofar as it was intended to provide HEIs with a tool to support strategic reflection and the adoption of mechanisms for continuous improvement oriented towards sustainability.

5. Discussion
One of the main innovations of this policy development process in Portugal in the HE sector was the establishing of an SA tool comprising 34 indicators for the measurement of USR. To this end, there was a wide-reaching review of the literature, including the core guidelines, the

setting up of a collaborative WG with several HEIs, the testing of an initial version of the tool in a pilot study and, consequently, the integration of the results into the final ISRHEI version. The final tool represents a benefit for all HEIs in Portugal and is strategic to the HEIs taking part in this policy process, especially given its consensus-based approach and shared conceptual understanding of USR. The methodology used ensures that the design of the tool is tailored to the reality of Portuguese HEIs, with added guarantees of its applicability and appropriation.

The ISRHEI self-assessment tool enables each HEI to implement all of the principles set out by Wallace and Resch (2017) on the grounds that only through knowing are we able to monitor and evaluate impacts (organisational, educational, cognitive and social). Undertaking the self-diagnosis process allows HEIs to define priorities and new targets.

This tool contributes to a greater awareness of SR in HEIs, for a consolidation of practices oriented towards sustainability and anchored in formalized policies and procedures. It also contributes to the entire academic community - faculty, non-teaching staff and students - directing their management, teaching and research practices to socially relevant purposes, working as a means of training for the exercise of active citizenship.

The ISRHEI tool equally facilitates organised and systematic communication with stakeholders based on disseminating the report generated by the IT platform. Within this scope, Wallace and Resch (2017) advocate the annual production of a SR report as such cyclical regularity enables the tracing of the path taken and the accompanying process of monitoring, interpreting and rectifying any eventual deviations from that originally planned.

Both the process around designing the ISRHEI tool and that of implementing it strengthen the need to conjugate a top-down driver (the leadership as the promoters of an orientation towards SR and as facilitators of an internal SA process) with the dynamic of a bottom-up movement, involving the stakeholders and integrating their contributions in order to consolidate a strategic change that is emerging as essential for HEIs: the turnaround towards systematic practices of SA, self-learning and the orientation towards socially responsible actions.

Wallace and Resch (2017) identify other features considered determinant to USR, specifically, the training of key staff members and the involvement and participation of students. As regards the former, this relates to how prior to integrating the tool into HEIs, empowerment sessions were first held for designated members of HEIs. A set of training sessions organised by ORSIES, available for SR teams, were implemented in order to acquire and/or develop specific competences, such as the understanding of SR in HEIs, the challenges of SA procedures, and the applications of the ISRHEI tool and IT platform. This stage appears to be fundamental for greater familiarity with the principles and assumptions of USR as well as a better understanding of the logics and importance of this exercise. Osagie et al. (2014) highlight the existence of specific competences acquired within the course of socially responsible actions. As regards the latter factor, we would highlight the importance of integrating students into the different phases of the ISRHEI development process. Upstream, students were integrated into one of the WG sessions, prior to the pilot study, and added a complementary vision based on their own experiences and expectations then duly incorporated into the initial version of the ISRHEI tool. The reaction of students participating in the WG session was enthusiastic and very active and they expressed different points of view while underlining the importance of their participation not only due to the newness of the initiative but also the importance of their perspectives on the topic. There is thus the recommendation that the SA process includes establishing teams that are representative of

the different HEI members and include students. This was highlighted as a positive and determinant benefit by some of the HEIs that integrated students into their SR teams during the pilot study. Downstream, this seeks to empower students to act in these domains, contributing towards raising their levels of awareness (Argento *et al.,* 2020) and enabling future actions in professional and community contexts through acquiring new mental paradigms (Alonso-Almeida *et al.*, 2015).

Furthermore, the Portuguese ISRHEI tool is innovative in its digital implementation as it receives full support from an IT platform that records the responses and data. Du *et al.* (2020) highlight the scope for the online recording of SA processes so as to enable more direct and convenient approaches capable of providing an incentive for participation. The completion of the ISRHEI tool on the platform opens up the scope for obtaining section reports, which are automatically generated, in keeping with the submission of the respective data, and made available in graphic formats that effectively portray the data while enabling comparisons between the different indicators.

Beyond the immediate gains the platform provides and its intuitive operation and adaptation to the timings of each HEI, it also serves as a repository because it simultaneously enables not only the aggregation of the data identified for the HEIs but also the scope for making comparative analysis between cycles of evaluation. The ISRHEI user manual enables the accompanying of each stage in this process.

We may identify the following limitations as regards the process of drafting the ISRHEI tool as well as the tool itself. The WG sessions do not amount to an exhaustive consultation of all stakeholders (e.g., *alumni*). The limited extent of participation by HEI management bodies in the WG sessions may generate negative impacts, especially in terms of HEIs adopting the ISRHEI tool. A third limitation derives from the different options of HEIs as regards the extent of the SA process: across every HEI, only some schools or faculties, through centralised processes or by organic units. A fourth limitation derives from the pilot study in which only 54% of the HEIs in the WG participated and thereby prevented more exhaustive feedback from across the diversity of the HEIs in the WG. Finally, the production of the ISRHEI tool was specifically tailored to the national context in Portugal and, therefore, its generalised application may require adaptation in other European contexts.

6. Conclusion

The reflection around SR in Portuguese HEIs is relatively recent, although there were previous projects with the intervention of national actors. The creation of ORSIES in 2017, supported by the State Secretariat for Science, Technology and HE, gave rise to a movement that aggregates the plurality of Portuguese HEIs with the aim of integrating SR in their practices and making a commitment to SD. The Green Paper was the fundamental step to understand the state of development of the topic and to assume a theoretical referential guiding model that mobilized for action. Thus, the option for the model by Vallaeys et al. (2009) is at the base of the Green Paper, the elaboration of the recommendations that emerged there and the creation of the SA tool that this paper describes.

For the elaboration of the tool, a collaborative methodology was chosen, which starts with a recognition of the existing reality, which learns from the sharing of practices and which is supported by the main global references on the topic. Likewise, a review was carried out, valuing the contexts and realities with greater proximity to Portugal, namely, the Iberoamerican countries.

The main results achieved with the elaboration of ISHREI tool show gains for HEIs, namely in the mobilization of its members, in the revision/reframing of strategic guidelines for management, in the integration of these themes in the context of training and in activities related to surrounding communities and fostering applied research that promotes the creation and dissemination of knowledge about SR and SD.

For a higher level of appropriation and the continuous utilisation by all Portuguese HEIs, we recommend that the sector supervisor and the national accreditation agency integrate this HEI self-assessment exercise into the criteria for evaluating the quality of HEIs and hence deploying Social Responsibility as a national priority.

7. References

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Designated abbreviation	Application context	Purpose and stage	No. of indicators	Type of indicators and percentage	Type of response	Scale	Type of evaluation	Results	Support**
ISRHEI	Regional*	Strategic orientation; for progress in the HEI commitment to SR over time; adapted to HEIs in an initial phase of commitment	34	Qualitative (17.7% include quantitative measures)	Binary (yes/no). Non-applicable option requests justification. Evidence required.	4 levels: Policies Procedures Practices Monitoring	Self-assessment	HEI report; Comparative report with overall results (other HEIs)	IT platform; Registration of information; Automatic proof of reporting.

Table I.: Characteristics of the ISRHEI self-assessment tool (based on Du *et al*., 2020)

* In the Du *et al.* (2020) proposal, the options are global or regional context. For ISRHEI, based on ORSIES (2018) recommendations, the option is "Regional".

** The final point does not feature in the proposal by Du *et al*. (2020).

Dimension	Theme	Indicators
Socially responsible campus [Organisational impacts]	Democratic and transparent governance	2
	Ethical orientation of the management processes and organisational activities	3
	Human rights and social inclusion policies	1
	Socially responsible management of persons and relationships	4
	Justice, transparency and equity in higher education access policies	1
	Environmentally sustainable, safe and healthy campus	4
	Socially responsible communications and marketing	1
Personal and professional training of students and relationships with *alumni* [Educational impacts]	Preparation of socially responsible citizens	3
	Promotion of educational success and combatting dropouts	2
	Promotion of lifelong employability and learning	2
	Promotion of mobility and collaboration nationally and internationally	1

	Strategies for fostering relationships with *alumni*	1
Socially responsible management of the production and dissemination of knowledge [Cognitive impacts]		6
Social Participation [Social impacts]		3

Table II. Dimensions, themes and indicators of the final ISRHEI tool

Level	Statements
1 [Attention]	HEI has adopted a code of ethics /conduct, covering the entire academic community.
2 [Formalize]	1. The code of ethics /conduct was subject to public discussion at the HEI and was approved by the competent bodies, including members of various academic community representatives.
	2. HEI communicates the code of ethics /conduct to the academic community and stakeholders.
3 [Implement]	1. HEI runs an ethics commission.
	2. HEI maintains channels for reporting situations of non-compliance with the code of ethics /conduct.
4 [Monitor and innovate]	The HEI periodically reviews the code of ethics /conduct.

Table III. ISRHEI Indicator "Producing and periodic review of a Code of Ethics/ Conduct" with the four sequential SR levels.