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UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: A PROPOSAL FOR EVALUATION

Responsabilidade Social Universitária: Uma Proposta De Avaliação

Responsabilidad social universitaria: una propuesta de evualuación

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Abstract: Higher Education Institutions possess specificities that must be considered when analyzed through the perspective of Social Responsibility. This article aims to propose a matrix of sustainability attributes and indicators in the context of University Social Responsibility and intended for application in Higher Education Institutions. To this end, categories of analyses were identified through a bibliographical review and documents related to Higher Education. From this, the *Delphi* methodology was applied to validate the matrix of sustainability attributes and indicators. Among the results, a matrix is proposed that takes into account four attributes (sustainable campus, transparency, integrality and community belonging); four dimensions of analysis (management, teaching, research and extension) broken down into 50 indicators that help measure the impacts of Higher Education Institutions on society.

Keywords: higher education; sustainability indicators; *Delphi* methodology.

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Resumo: As instituições de ensino superior possuem especificidades que precisam ser levadas em consideração quando analisadas na perspectiva da Responsabilidade Social. Este artigo tem como objetivo a proposição de uma matriz de atributos e indicadores de sustentabilidade no contexto da Responsabilidade Social Universitária a ser aplicado em Instituições de Ensino Superior. Para tal, por meio de revisão bibliográfica e de documentos atinentes ao Ensino Superior, foram identificadas categorias de análise. A partir disso, aplicou-se a metodologia *Delphi* para a validação da matriz dos atributos e dos indicadores de sustentabilidade. Dentre os resultados, propõe-se uma matriz que leva em consideração quatro atributos (campus sustentável, transparência, integralidade e pertença comunitária) e quatro dimensões para análise (gestão, ensino, pesquisa e a extensão) desdobrados em 50 indicadores que auxiliam na mensuração dos impactos das Instituições de Ensino Superior na sociedade.

Palavras-chave: educação superior; indicadores de sustentabilidade; método *Delphi*.

Resumen: Las instituciones de educación superior tienen especificidades que deben ser tomadas en consideración cuando se analizan desde la perspectiva de la Responsabilidad Social. Este artículo tiene como objetivo proponer una matriz de atributos e indicadores de sostenibilidad en el contexto de la Responsabilidad Social Universitaria para ser aplicados en las Instituciones de Educación Superior. Para ello, a través de una revisión bibliográfica y de documentos relacionados con la Educación Superior, se identificaron categorías de análisis. A partir de esto se aplicó la metodología *Delphi* para validar la matriz de atributos e indicadores de sostenibilidad. Entre los resultados se propone una matriz que toma en cuenta cuatro atributos (campus sustentable, transparencia, integralidad y pertenencia comunitaria); cuatro dimensiones de análisis (gestión, docencia, investigación y extensión) desglosadas en 50 indicadores que ayudan a medir los impactos de las Instituciones de Educación Superior en la sociedad.

Palabras clave: educación superior; indicadores de sostenibilidad; método *Delphi*.

1 INTRODUCTION

Universities are institutions with deep-rooted social traditions. They are complex and unique organizations within the social fabric, especially regarding their structure, governance, and decision-making processes. Characterized as service-oriented institutions, universities inherently bear Social Responsibility (SR).

In the university context, SR constitutes a managerial policy that redefines the traditional notions of extension and philanthropic social outreach, introducing a comprehensive approach to managing the administrative and academic impacts across all university activities. This evolving policy has gradually come to be understood as University Social Responsibility (USR), as it encapsulates elements that reflect the specific social impacts generated by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

The Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988 and the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB) of 1996 address university autonomy and the inseparability of teaching, research, and extension, thereby establishing both rights and obligations for HEIs. The right to autonomously direct their internal affairs is accompanied by the duty to assume responsibility for their activities and societal impacts, effectively responding to the transformative needs of the society in which they operate.

As social institutions, universities possess the capacity to influence a wide array of stakeholders, local communities, and society at large. Moreover, universities and their surrounding communities can mutually benefit from effective engagement, particularly through enhanced mutual understanding, shared facilities and knowledge, the identification of additional resources, and meaningful contributions to local sustainable development (Chen; Vanclay, 2021).

On the other hand, HEIs are not universally required to provide evidence of their SR practices. In the case of Community Higher Education Institutions (CHEIs), Law No. 12,881/2013, Article 4, item IV, mandates the submission of a Social Responsibility Report in reference to the previous fiscal year to the Ministry of Education (MEC) as part of the qualification process for CHEI status. Furthermore, Article 3 of the same law stipulates that CHEIs must adopt accountability standards, including the public disclosure of activity reports and financial statements (Brasil, 2013). Consequently, while many CHEIs do publish SR reports, the legislation, the legislation does not explicitly require public accountability for their SR practices.

However, additional regulations, such as those pertaining to the Certification of Charitable Social Assistance Entities (CEBAS), may impose further obligations in this regard. Governed by Law No. 12,101/2009, this certification demands transparency and public access to the activities of certified institutions (Brasil, 2009b). Although the legislation does not explicitly require that all CHEIs report on their SR practices, those holding CEBAS certification must submit detailed reports to the MEC—encompassing both education and social initiatives—as a prerequisite for mainting certification and accessing tax benefits.

When considering the particular impacts generated by HEIs (whether internal or external, environmental, educational, or epistemological), there is currently no standardized set of criteria or procedures for their assessment. Each institution reports its impacts according to its own methods. A defined set of criteria would elevate the analytical depth and monitoring of sustainability practices and initiatives

At the same time, determining specific indicators for the higher education sector requires consideration of sustainability attributes that reflect the level of institutional commitment to sustainable development. An attribute, in this context, refers to a quality or characteristic associated with the element under analysis (Leal Jr.; Guimarães; Pereira, 2017). Clearly defined sustainability attributes serve as conceptual guides, reducing ambiguity while also elucidating the conditions or pathways an institution has pursued to become a sustainable organization.

Accordingly, universities are understood as unique organizations—ones that must surpass the three conventional pillars of sustainability (economic, social, and environmental) by incorporating also the specificities of their organizational activities: education, research, operations, and community outreach (Lozano *et al.*, 2015; Vallaeys, 2018).

The objective of this article is to propose a matrix of sustainability attributes and indicators within the context of USR, applicable to all HEIs regardless of their academic structure. Given that the National Higher Education Assessment System (SINAES) encompasses diverse academic organizations, this proposal aims to offer a model adaptable to the institutional diversity of Brazilian higher education. To this end, the *Delphi* method was employed to validate the matrix of sustainability attributes and indicators through consultation with experts active in higher education, either in core academic roles or in institutional management.

In this light, HEIs are seen as organizations that significantly affect the life of their various stakeholders (administrative staff, faculty, and student body), with their day-to-day operations generating environmental, economic, and social impacts. As Vallaeys (2018) emphasizes, the university is the site where individuals attain their highest level of technical, scientific, and human development—where both professional competence and civic responsibility are cultivated, oriented toward the transformations to which society aspires.

Beyond this introduction, the article is structured as follows: Section 2 discusses the theoretical foundations that supported the design of the attribute and indicator matrix. Section 3 details the methodological approach adopted for the research and matrix construction. Section 4 presents a discussion of the partial results obtained. Finally, Section 5 offers concluding remarks on the study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 University social responsibility and sustainability

USR is a concept intertwined with related notions such as Social Responsibility, Corporate Social Responsibility, Socio-Environmental Responsibility, Sustainable Development, and Education for Sustainability (Meserguer-Sánchez *et al.*, 2020). This understanding aligns with Vallaeys (2018), who argues that USR embodies the potential to foster meaningful dialogue between HEIs and society. For the author, USR is not a tool to serve the market, nor a philanthropic showcase in the case of private HEIs, nor even a metric for public HEIs to demonstrate inclusivity or outreach to marginalized populations.

Instead, USR expresses the public function of higher education, transcending the instrumental role of technical capacitation and workforce training to incorporate social relevance and responsiveness to societal needs and deficiencies (Dias Sobrinho, 2005; Calderón; Gomes; Borges, 2011; Martí-Noguera, Calderón, Fernández-Godenzi, 2018). USR has been increasingly presented as a mechanism to operationalize sustainability within society (Ahmad *et al.*, 2020; Lavor Filho *et al.*, 2021).

Investigating the relationship between USR and HEIs is a vital responsibility of academic institutions, essential for deepening debates about the distinct impacts they generate. However, institutionalizing USR initiatives remains a challenge. While many such initiatives exist, they are often fragmented, failing to integrate fully into the triad of teaching, research, and extension. Teaching becomes socially responsible when it prepares individuals to live ethically in society, fostering human development through knowledge linked to quality of life (Calderón, 2005, Calderón; Gomes; Borges, 2016; Martí-Noguera; Calderón; Fernández-Godenzi, 2018; Adel; Zeinhom; Younis, 2021).

In the current information and knowledge society, the impacts generated by universities are multifaceted: educational (through academic formation), cognitive (through investigation and research), social (through extension activities), and organizational (through management practices) (Vallaeys, 2017, 2018). The foundational basis of the university, then, is rooted in commitment to ethical and moral principles expressed through four core processes: management, teaching, research, and extension, thus fulfilling its social accountability to both its academic community and the broader society or country in which it operates (Vallaeys, 2018).

USR can be defined as a policy framework for the ethical quality management of universities, aiming to align their four core institutional processes with mission, values, and social commitments. This alignment is pursued through transparency and dialogical participation from the academic community. Through this movement, the university positions itself as an agent of societal transformation, seeking ways to combat exclusion, inequality, and unsustainability (Vallaeys, 2006, 2017).

In this context, Yousuf (2018) argues that international standards such as ISO 9001 and ISO 26000 have helped shape the conceptual boundaries of SR within HEIs. The first, which focuses on quality management and accreditation, certifies institutions

based on organizational and planning processes. The latter, meanwhile, establishes a broader, society-oriented managerial approach to SR in academic institutions. This perspective is echoed in Article 3, item III of the legislation establishing Brazil's National Higher Education Evaluation System (SINAES), which identifies USR as one of the ten dimensions in the institutional self-evaluation process (Brasil, 2009a).

Another international initiative that has made significant contributions to SR in HEIs is the Bologna Process—Europe's regulatory framework for higher educational reform—which led to the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), based on principles of quality, mobility, diversity, and competitiveness. Although initially market-oriented, the Bologna Process gradually incorporated the social dimension of HEIs, emphasizing their public responsibility for fostering social development (Meseguer-Sánchez *et al.*, 2020).

Similarly, the United Nations, through global initiatives such as the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015), particularly SDG 4, has significantly contributed to shaping USR. These efforts advocate for inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education that fosters learning opportunities for all (ONU, 2015). Such initiatives have gradually encouraged universities to adopt pedagogical methods that contribute to the development of a just and sustainable society. While these motivations are variably referred to as Educational Responsibility or University Social Responsibility (USR), the latter is more widely adopted in international discourse.

In Latin America, the concept of USR has been gradually constructed through philosophical discussions on ethics in academia and the influence of the Catholic Church in the public life, as noted by Parsons (2014). Since the early 2000s, the region has witnessed the development of USR models and university social commitments aimed at redefining the social role of universities as institutions in light of ethical challenges posed by globalization (Vallaeys; Rodríguez, 2019). These models emerged through collaborative efforts between HEIs and local communities.

USR in Latin America has matured into a well-established movement with nearly two decades of existence. It began with the Chilean network "*Universidad Construye País*", followed by the Inter-American Development Bank's Initiative on Ethics, Social Capital, and development, and continues with the establishment of the *Unión de Responsabilidad Social Universitaria Latinoamericana* (URSULA). URSULA's USR initiatives encompasses four areas of impact management: organizational governance, education, cognition, and social participation—operationalized through 66 performance indicators distributed across 12 strategic goals. This research adopts this USR model as its foundation due to its implementation in 170 universities across 14 Latin American countries, including Brazil (URSULA, 2019). Its selection is further justified by its integration of the core dimensions outlined in earlier models developed prior to its creation in 2010.

Figure 1 – The 12 USR goals of the URSULA model

Source**:** Vallaeys (2019); URSULA (2019).

URSULA provides a toolkit—referred to as the "first steps manual"—to help HEIs identify measures that foster a more just and sustainable society. This guide supports the establishment of dialogue and self-assessment processes that facilitate interdepartmental collaboration and local development (Vallaeys; Cruz; Sasia, 2009, Kiszner, 2016; URSULA, 2019). According to Vallaeys, Cruz, and Sasia (2009), the URSULA model of USR diagnosis includes four implementation steps: commitment, self-assessment, compliance, and accountability.

The first stage involves the HEI publicly committing to its community, much like it does when preparing strategic plans such as the Institutional Development Plan (PDI) or the Institutional Pedagogical Project (PPI). Such commitment involves reaching a broad consensus to foster active participation, promoting a culture of engagement that aligns institutional practices with stakeholder interests (URSULA, 2019; Vallaeys, 2021). In this framework, USR is understood as the management and regulation of institutional impacts based on stakeholder expectations and demands (Chicharro; Carrillo; Rosa, 2015).

Sustainability evaluation initiatives in HEIs are carried out both internally and by external stakeholders, including public and private funding agencies, accreditation bodies, international organizations, and philanthropic institutions. Although many universities have increasingly incorporated sustainability into their operations, these efforts are often fragmented and focused on internal operations and affairs, with limited attention given to their unique social roles and the external impacts of their social contract. Existing indicators offer an initial framework for developing more

nuanced evaluation approaches that better capture the extramural effects of HEIs (Greenmetric, 2018; Horan; O'regan, 2021; Sindelar; Barden; Stülp, 2021).

Regarding the dissemination of sustainability efforts in HEIs, Lozano *et al.* (2015), Ceulemans; Lozano; Alonso-Almeida (2015), and Weber *et al.* (2020) highlight a marked increase in corporate sustainability reporting over the last decade. However, sustainability reporting in the higher education sector remains in its infancy

A critical factor for the effective use of sustainability indicators in measuring, diagnosing, and predicting possible scenarios is the establishment of underlying attributes (Alshuwaikhat; Abubakar, 2008; Aina; Abubakar; Alshuwaikhat, 2019). Moreover, these attributes can not only support the institutionalization of sustainability within HEIs but also inform the design of sustainability models and offer new perspective on sustainable practices. According to Lima (2017) and Bahia (2021), a well-defined and practical set of attributes is essential for ensuring the quality and efficacy of sustainability indicators used to measure organizational practices.

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This research is exploratory and descriptive in nature, employing a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative). The proposed matrix of sustainability attributes and indicators for HEIs, within the context of USR, is grounded in the work of Masera, Astier, López-Ridaura (1999) and Verona (2008), who developed a framework for assessing the sustainability of natural resource management systems (MESMIS, in its Spanish acronym). In reinterpreting the MESMIS methodology, the study sought alignment with systemic sustainability assessments, as advocated by Marcus *et al.* (2015); a participatory, interdisciplinary, and cross-cutting approach, as advocated by Vallaeys (2018); and the University Social Responsibility Manual (URSULA, 2019).

Analytical categories were derived from a literature review and documents relevant to higher education that characterize its specificities (such as the structure of PDIs). To validate the proposed matrix of attributes and indicators, a modified *Delphi* method was employed. As a qualitative research methodology, the *Delphi* method is noted for its ability to gather insights and opinions of geographically dispersed experts in similar subjects in a structured manner. It is defined as a method to organize a collective communication process so that it becomes effective in enabling a group of individuals to deal with complex problems (Linstone; Turoff, 2011). According to Pareja (2003), the *Delphi* method is a technique for aggregating informed opinions about a subject through surveys or questionnaires, providing reliable data for decision-making.

This study adopted the "modified *Delphi*" method, as suggested by Murray and Hammons (1995) and Linstone and Turoff (2011), which has gained widespread usage. While the traditional *Delphi* method involves three or more rounds, the modified approach comprises only two, avoiding the time-intensive and potentially discouraging

nature of extended iterations for both researchers and participants. Each round demands significant time and commitment, and limiting the process to two rounds maintains the interest of participants, increases the likelihood of sustained participation, and minimizes the number of withdrawals throughout the process (Menéses *et al.*, 2018; García *et al.*, 2019). The central goal of the *Delphi* method is to reach a reasoned consensus among a group of experts on a specific issue or problem (Facione, 1990).

In each round, experts were asked to evaluate the specificity and sensitivity of the elements under analysis, alongside the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questionnaire items. Their feedback included both evaluative scores and qualitative suggestions for improvement.

The modified *Delphi* process in this study followed a 10-step structure, as suggested by Linstone and Turoff (2011) and Yousuf (2007), as detailed in Table 1 below:

Table 1 – Stages of the modified *Delphi* method application

Step	**Activity**
1	Formulation of research instruments
2	Selection of the panel of experts
3	Initial contact with experts, explanation of methodology, and invitation to participate
4	Distribution of instruments via email for the first round
5	Receipt of contributions from experts and compilation of first-round responses
6	Qualitative and quantitative analysis of first-round expert feedback
7	Distribution of revised instruments for second-round participation
8	Receipt of feedback for the compilation of second-round responses
9	Qualitative and quantitative analysis of second-round feedback
10	Conclusion of the process and writing of the final report

Source: Adapted from Linstone and Turoff (2011) and Yousuf (2007).

An expert panel should ideally consist of between 10 to 18 individuals—without exceeding the recommended cap of 30 (Munaretto; Corrêa; Cunha, 2013). The selection process considered the nature of the research question and the geographical distribution of potential participants. Powell (2003) argues that statistical representativeness is not essential in such panels; instead, focus should be placed on the quality of expertise and relevance to the subject matters. Marques and Freitas (2018) further recommend beginning with a comfortably larger group than necessary, as typically no more than half tend to respond to the initial invitation, and it is common that participation declines throughout the process, reducing the size of the expert panel in subsequent rounds.

In this study, efforts were made to ensure diverse representation across pedagogical and administrative roles in HEIs—including universities, university centers, and colleges. Therefore, experts were chosen based on their academic and administrative experience, regardless of academic affiliation, with special emphasis on alignment with the research topic, assessed through their professional résumés (Lattes curriculum). The final panel included representatives in various related occupations and academic-administrative positions: (01) Evaluator from the Anísio Teixeira National Institute for Educational Studies and Research – INEP; (01) Coordinator from an Internal Evaluation Commission – CPA; (01) Course coordinator; (01) Campus director; (01) Administrative faculty core member; (01) University rector; (02) University pro-rector; and (05) University professors. In total, 13 experts participated in validating the indicators, originating from universities, university centers, and colleges, ensuring institutional diversity in analyzing and validating the proposed matrix.

A total of 18 experts from the states of Tocantins, Paraná, Rondônia, São Paulo, and Rio Grande do Sul were contacted via telephone and email. Five withdrew after the first-round materials were sent via email, citing unfamiliarity with the concepts of attributes, indicators, and USR, or with the institutional documents involved. The contributions from the remaining 13 experts were analyzed for their relevance and alignment with the research objectives and theoretical framework. A consolidated version was then redistributed for the second and final round after a desired level of reasoned consensus had been achieved.

The *Delphi* method is marked by iterative rounds, in which the research instrument is sent to and returned by the panelists until consensus is reached through the resolution of divergences. According to Grisham (2009), 80% consensus is considered a strong indicator; this threshold was met in this study. Throughout this validation process (across two rounds), multiple methodological strategies were employed to assess whether the indicators and items accurately reflected the intended evaluation construct. In the first round, all 13 selected experts responded, resulting in a 100% response rate. In the second round, after the revised instrument was distributed, 10 experts participated (77% response rate).

The matrix of attributes and indicators was constructed based on different approaches: a literature review regarding the topic, the URSULA model of USR, and through empirical evidence gathered during consultation with the panel of experts. Many of the indicators that comprise the matrix suggested during the consultation rounds resembled those found in the URSULA model, including sustainable campus initiatives and community belonging.

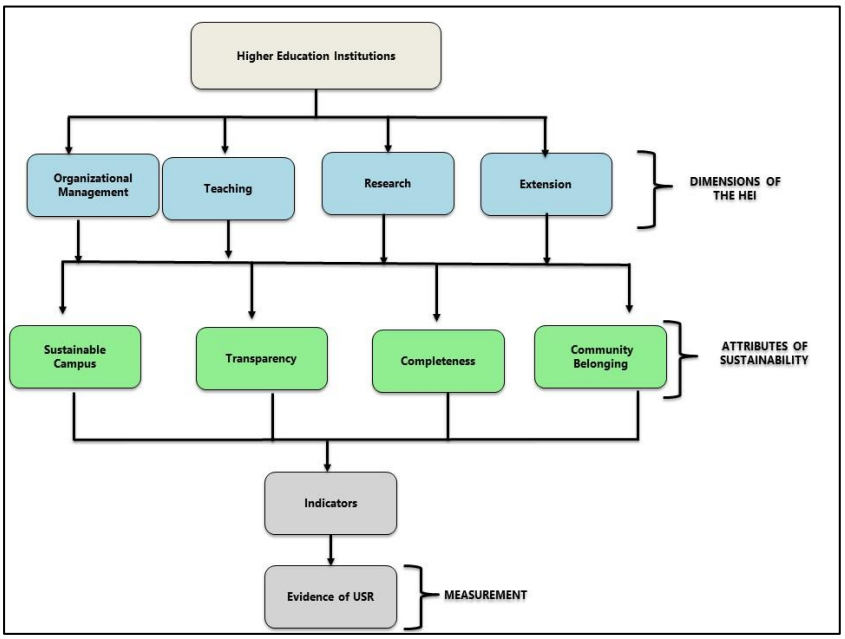
4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The structure of the proposed framework is designed to demonstrate how sustainability is enacted within HEIs through their USR practices. For universities and Scientific, Technological, and Innovation Institutions (ICTs), Article 207 of the Brazilian Federal Constitution mandates the inseparability of teaching, research, and extension, ensuring institutional autonomy and accountability (Brasil, 1988). Although colleges and university centers are not legally bound by this mandate, they may voruntarily adopt sustainability practices in alignment with their institutional profiles. The proposed matrix allows for flexible adaptation to the unique characteristics and needs of each HEI, facilitating the identification, implementation, and communication of sustainable initiatives through USR, translated into sustainability attributes.

From the perspective of these attributes, sustainable HEIs are those that implement sustainable management of their campuses, engage transparently and inclusively with their communities, and systematically integrate the inseparability of teaching, research, and extension. This set of sustainability attributes must provide a structured framework to guide the documentation and communication of USR through routine sustainable practices.

Accordingly, the flowchart in Figure 2 illustrate the diagnostic pathway for sustainability within HEIs. Each point of the four dimensions is associated with specific indicators, which serve as diagnostic criteria interwoven with the various sustainability attributes. This approach enables a systemic relationship between the proposed indicators and attributes, thereby allowing the HEIs to measure their sustainability conditions in a coherent manner.

Figure 2 – Flowchart for sustainability diagnostic in HEIs from a USR perspective: dimensions, attributes, and indicators.



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Based on the proposed sustainability attributes, HEIs are encouraged to. Disclose their USR practices across four strategic dimensions. Three of these (teaching, research, and extension) are legally embedded in Brazilian educational legislation, implicitly referenced in the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (Brasil, 1996) and explicitly stated in Article 207 of the 1988 Federal Constitution (Brasil, 1998). The fourth, organizational management, is informed by sustainability indicator frameworks suggested by Vázquez (2015), Vallaeys (2018), and URSULA (2019). Vallaeys (2017) emphasizes that the theoretical basis for USR demands that HEIs adopt a rational, coherent, and transversal policy to address the distinct impacts their activities exert on society.

In this sense, managing these impacts—organizational (management), educational (teaching), cognitive (research), and social (extension)—offers HEIs the opportunity to integrate sustainability into routine institutional practices, thereby contributing to transformation toward a sustainable society. By identifying the types of impacts generated and the associated risks, HEIs have the opportunity to promote mitigation strategies that consider the engagement of both academic and non-academic communities. By recognizing these impacts, the four proposed attributes provide an identity to sustainability practices within institutional management.

4.1 Sustainability attributes

The proposed set of attributes, outlined in the matrix of Figure 2, is grounded in the premise that sustainability within a HEI is defined by a sustainable campus, transparency in its everyday practices, and by fostering holistic and integral approaches, anchored in the belief that the community belongs to the institution as much as the institution belongs to its community.

The "sustainable campus" attribute is defined by the socially responsible management of the institution and its internal affairs and procedures, encompassing labor climate, internal democratic governance, and environmental concern (URSULA, 2019; Vallaeys, 2021). The "transparency" attribute refers to the institution's capacity to make its routine practices and resulting data accessible to both academic and non-academic communities (URSULA, 2019; Vallaeys, 2021).

Conversely, the "integrality" attribute connects USR practices to sustainability through the coherent management of the inseparability between teaching, research, and extension. This attribute fosters interconnections among the environmental, economic, and social dimensions at multiple scales (from local to global), expanding positive synergies and mitigating negative externalities. It is underpinned by a systemic and complex worldview, in which the macro is reflected in the micro and vice versa, and all elements are interrelated (Marcus *et al.*, 2015).

The "community belonging" attribute is characterized by the socially responsible management of a HEI community engagement through programs, projects, and practices that foster mutual learning and social development. This attribute supports the co-creation of solutions to concrete social problems (URSULA, 2019; Vallaeys, 2021).

The combination of these attributes with the institutional dimensions promotes synergies that enrich the scope of sustainability-oriented practices, while serving as foundation for the development of new indicators and obtaining consistent, reliable results, ultimately facilitating the advancement of sustainability through USR.

In this context, it is expected that the attributes, as well as the indicators from them derived, will contribute to the development or reformulation of routine practices within HEIs. Ultimately, this will foster the construction of a comprehensive USR policy. As a result of this evaluative process, HEIs gain the opportunity to effectively communicate their processes and outcomes, aiming to mitigate their negative impacts and externalizing their positive contributions

4.2 Sustainability indicators

To broaden the concept and practice of USR, this study developed, based on Vallaeys (2021) and the USR Manual from URSULA, a set of 50 indicators aimed at identifying concrete evidence of such practices and, consequently, recognizing the degree of engagement of HEIs with sustainability through their management, teaching, research, and extension. Each dimension incorporates the four proposed attributes, each of which unfolds into indicators that serve as evidence. The indicators are presented hereafter, ranked according to a respective dimension.

a) Organizational governance

The indicators within this dimension reflect the responsibility of HEIs toward their surrounding communities, serving to both reveal and mitigate institutional impacts by promoting a transparent and systemic management model that involves both academic and non-academic communities. In this regard, the proposed indicators foster the creation of meaningful connections with society to evidentiate their organizational management practices, aiming to achieve institutional stability. For this dimension, the proposed indicators are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2 – Organizational governance dimension: attributes and indicators

Attribute	Indicator
Sustainable campus	Campus infrastructure
	Socially responsible purchasing policies
	Sustainable campus practices
	Synergy between staff and organizational processes
Transparency	Participation of collegial bodies, councils, and academic committes in PDI-related discussions
	Availability of periodic management data and reports
	Social Responsibility Report / Balance Sheet
	Strategic Planning co-constructed with the academic community
	Openness to receiving feedback
Integrality	Existence of a code of ethics/conduct
	Institutional values and principles enacted and integrated into the academic community
Community belonging	Participation of external community in PDI discussions
	Inclusion of the UN 2030 Agenda in strategic planning
	Participation in USR networks
	Institutional values and principles enacted and integrated into the non-academic community

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2022).

The suggested indicators consider the specific context in which HEIs enact their academic and administrative actions. A positive institutional environment suggests a commitment to achieving its objective, mission, vision, policies, and strategic goals; conversely, a negative environment often generates both internal and external conflicts accompanied by diminished human potential and productivity (Vallayes, 2021).

From a sustainable campus perspective, institutional practices are expected to promote ethical and transparent engagement with both academic and non-academic communities. Thus, organizational governance, guided by these attributes and indicators, guides a transversal policy approach capable of both mapping and managing the impacts of institutional operations with systematic results (URSULA, 2019);

b) Teaching dimension

The indicators suggested within this dimension offer concrete evidence regarding academic training, curriculum organization, and teaching methodologies managed by each HEI through its own processes and educational governance. Moreover, these indicators guide institutions in assessing the organization of their curricular matrices, particularly concerning the participation of both academic and non-academic communities.

This dimension was constructed with the understanding that HEIs exert societal impact primarily through their teaching practices. Therefore, the matrix proposes a set of indicators aligned with attributes such as sustainable campus, transparency, integrality, and community belonging (Table 3).

Table 3 – Teaching dimension: attributes and indicators

Attribute	Indicator
Sustainable campus	Training in environmental topics for students, utilizing the campus infrastructure and the HEI's sustainability expertise
	Guidelines to integrate Agenda 2030 themes transversally across courses
Transparency	Student participation in curriculum design and review
	Feedback of institutional self-evaluation results to the academic community
Integrality	Academic activities conducted in cooperation with other HEIs to address sustainability themes
	Ethical and civic education activities aimed at nurturing socially responsible individuals
	Integration of research results, case studies, and teaching methodologies into course curricula
	Inclusion of discussions on contemporary social injustices and environmental risks in lesson planning
Community belonging	Participation of non-academic individuals in curricular updates
	Connection of teaching to social entrepreneurship and social innovation initiatives
	Transdisciplinary educational and investigational guidelines on sustainability that grounded in local realities
	Training in teaching methodologies focused on integrating education with addressing local social problems

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2022).

Given the above, the indicators proposed in this dimension urge HEIs to structure their educational strategies beyond traditional curricular subject-based instruction. They call for the integration of socio-environmental urgencies into curricula to foster socioeconomic innovation, which entails moving from an outdated paradigm centered on employability to a more contemporary model of socially responsible innovation—one in which regenerative economics serves as the foundation for developing professionals capable of creating value without severing social bonds (Vallaeys, 2021);

c) Research dimension

The indicators within this dimension consider the sustainability attributes from the perspective of practices that reveal transversal, community-centered investigative efforts, aimed at solving problems identified by the communities themselves. Furthermore, these indicators affirm that research must generate and disseminate

knowledge that is meaningful and accessible to both academic and non-academic communities.

Within this dimension, the matrix proposes sustainability indicators based on the four attributes: sustainable campus, transparency, integrality, and community belonging. These indicators, as outlined in Table 4, frame scientific activity through the articulation of lines of research connected to external stakeholders, alignment the production of knowledge with both local and national development agendas, and incorporation of public policy considerations. This dimension also underscores that knowledge production must embrace participation across academic and non-academic communities and cultivate interdisciplinarity.

Table 4 – Research dimension: attributes and indicators

Attribute	Indicator
Sustainable campus	Existence of research projects focused on ecological efficiency and R&D carried out using the university campus
Transparency	Participation of research, ethics, extension committees, among others, in shaping the institution's research policy
	Establishment of channels and methods for science communication and the dissemination of research findings
	Provision of partial feedback to affected publics throughout the research process
Integrality	Development of applied research that align R&D projects with social and environmental goals
	Incentives for socio-environmental, economic development, and social inclusion research
	Support for inter- and transdisciplinary research projects
Community belonging	Alliances and partnerships with non-academic community members to co-develop research agendas aligned with social demands
	Research projects developed collaboratively between individual researchers or research groups with businesses for technological development
	Research projects developed in partnership with public institutions targeting social innovation
	Initiatives to transfer technologies developed on campus aimed at mitigating the social and environmental impacts of its operations

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2022).

The indicators within this dimension emphasize that research conducted by HEIs should be systematic, involving the participation of committees, organizations, and businesses as collaborative agents in the construction of new knowledge. They call for the mapping of R&D projects, both within and outside the HEI, that may be aligned with economic and sustainable development goals.

Moreover, these indicators aim to reveal the cognitive impacts of research which, in turn, generate broader societal impacts. They urge us to assess both what HEIs are producing in terms of knowledge and how students are actively engaged in the process. In this context, inter- and transdisciplinary research can guide students to

co-create non-academic knowledge that responds meaningfully to the cultural demands of the information and knowledge society (URSULA, 2019).

d) Extension dimension

The indicators within this dimension are aligned with the sustainability attributes in order to reveal the impacts of extension activities in HEIs. The management of extension programs originates from the interaction between the HEI, the environment, and society. It draws upon the other dimensions—management, teaching, and research—aiming to contribute to the development of a just, inclusive, and sustainable society. To achieve this, academic training must go beyond the technical knowledge and the professional formation of future graduates, while integrating ethical, humanistic, and moral values cultivated through active participation in social responsibility projects and programs, particularly those directed at vulnerable groups.

The socially responsible management of questions aimed at the engagement of HEIs with the broader community through extension involves mutual learning projects, fostering socioeconomic development, as detailed in Table 5.

Table 5 – Extension dimension: attributes and indicators

Attribute	Indicator
Sustainable campus	Sustainable policy for making campus facilities and spaces accessible to the broader community
Transparency	Policy ensuring inseparability of teaching, research, and extension within the academic community
	Monitoring and evaluation of the impact and sustainability of social projects conducted with the academic community
	Extension policy prioritized in surrounding communities, aimed at solving social and environmental issues identified by those communities themselves
Integrality	Active participation in the discussion and development of public policy within the local community
	Incentives for extension projects with a focus on socio-environmental and socioeconomic development, and social inclusion
	Promotion of extension projects on environmental issues for non-academic communities, based on sustainability know-how and campus infrastructure
Community belonging	Alliances and synergies with non-academic community members to co-develop extension policies that respond to social needs
	Academic community involved in capacity-building for groups, communities, and individuals in vulnerable situations
	Extension projects developed in partnership with public institutions, targeting social innovation
	Long-term extension projects, engaged with local communities, that promote entrepreneurship and individual autonomy

Source: Elaborated by the authors (2022).

Conducted in this manner, extension activities contribute to the technical formation and development of social sensibility of students and staff, which will manifest in their future professional practice. Moreover, the indicators encourage the integration of academic formation and research into co-created community projects, fostering a long-term perspective and participation in local, national, and international agendas (Valleys, 2021).

The proposed matrix of attributes and indicators can be adapted to various types of HEIs. However, its implementation may vary according to the structure of each institution. The generalization of USR to all HEIs is not only appropriate but highly desirable, as institutions—regardless of academic organization—play a fundamental role in shaping individuals and promoting sustainability. The SINAES reinforces this by including the assessment of SR as a relevant aspect of HEIs, while recognizing institutional diversity. Thus, while teaching, research, and extension requirements differ according to legal classifications, adopting this matrix supports the ability of each HEI to fulfill its commitments to social responsibility and sustainable development.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article presented the development of a set of sustainability attributes and indicators, grounded in the contributions of Vallaeys (2021), Vallaeys and Rodríguez (2019), URSULA (2019), among others, to standing literature. The outcome is a proposed matrix applicable to any HEI, structured around four core attributes and four analytical dimensions, articulated through 50 sustainability indicators.

This set of indicators was designed to reflect the distinct impacts that HEIs generate within society, encompassing organizational management, teaching, research, and extension. Furthermore, the matrix integrates four sustainability attributes: sustainable campus, transparency, integrality, and community belonging, which intersect across all dimensions according to their own unique impacts on HEIs.

The proposed matrix of attributes and indicators also seeks to provoke reflection within the academic community regarding (new) perspectives on the role HEIs play with respect to their economic, environmental, and social duties. In this sense, we hope that the tools proposed in this work, when offered as a systemic framework, will enable institutions to critically assess diverse impacts of their operations (as a foundation for the realization of the other dimensions), and to do so in a way that meaningfully involves the social actors with whom they interact, directly and indirectly, across teaching, research, extension, and governance.

In addressing USR, this study underscores the importance of integrating socio-environmental responsibility principles into institutional practices, fostering new forms of relationship between society and the environment.

HEIs, in this regard, assume a pivotal role in shaping a socially responsible society, as they are instrumental in the formation of conscious, committed citizens. Through the implementation of USR practices, these institutions reaffirm their

commitment to sustainable development by privileging present action while honoring the future. Thus, this process demands not only academic excellence but also the promotion of equity and engagement in projects that offer opportunities for research and extension, expanding their positive impacts on society and providing services and knowledge to the community.

In addition, sustainability from a USR perspective encourages students to become agents of change, applying their knowledge and abilities to build a sustainable society. This approach contributes to the development of ethical professionals who are committed to sustainable development. Through such practices, HEIs affirm their exemplary role for other organizations in constructing a more just and inclusive society, where knowledge is used to tackle real challenges.

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Author contributions

Júlia Elisabete Barden - Research supervision regarding objectives, methodological procedures, literature review, and text revision.

Valtuir dos Santos Filho - Survey of bibliographic references, data collection, data analysis, writing.

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The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest with the article: "University Social Responsibility: A Proposal For Evaluation".

Data availability

The data underlying this research are contained within the article.

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