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Development of Universities' Social Responsibility through Academic service learning programs

— ABSTRACT —

Universities with their educational, research and social performance directly influence the quality of life in communities. Socially responsible universities foster the development of entrepreneurial behavior and social responsibility of their students and show that they know and can respond to actual social issues, not only through projects referred to community development, but also through programs and courses that educate young people how to become active participants in the process of making positive social changes. Such educational programs, also known as “academic service learning programs“, allow students transfer knowledge and skills gained in the classroom into practical projects within their communities thus becoming more socially aware and active. Such programs are important component of socially responsible performance of universities; they reinforce the connection between universities and local communities, show that universities are capable to recognize what is going on in their society and actively participate in the development of the culture where socially responsible behavior of its actors is not a mean to an end but an end itself.

In Croatia most universities are neglecting the responsibility they have toward their community thus focusing merely on educational and research component. This paper describes the case of the academic service learning course Entrepreneurial skill I at Faculty of Economics in Osijek as one of the rare examples of fostering development of social responsibilities of students. This course encourages students to stop being passive observers of social phenomena, but instead, through active participation in the community, to have direct impact on solving current social issues and develop skills with which they will ensure successful employment. The project “Contribution to the Community” within the course is an important activity that helps students retain and improve their skills,

provides opportunity to explore new options, gives pleasure because of participating in solving community's problems, and contributes to building problem solving capacity.

Fostering and developing entrepreneurial mindset of students affects both their personal development and the economic and social development of the community they live in. The methodology used to identify models used for development of entrepreneurial behaviors of college students is based on a review of literature (entrepreneurship education, knowledge society, universities' social responsibility, academic service learning programs, higher education and economic development) and qualitative studies and recommendations related to supporting students' active engagement in the community and collaboration between local communities, universities and students.

Key words: *entrepreneurial behavior, entrepreneurial education, social responsibility, socially responsible universities, academic service learning program*

1. Introduction

The issue of social responsibility in the past several years has been emerging as an increasingly important component of sustainable economic and social development. Although, when it comes to social responsibility, it is usually large corporations that are under public scrutiny, social responsibility must be the backbone of operation of all other actors of society. Universities, which directly influence the quality of life in the community with their educational, research and social actions, certainly belong to these actors. Through socially responsible behavior universities demonstrate that know and can respond to current social issues both through personal projects related to community development and through educational programs which educate young people to become socially responsible individuals and equal participants in creating positive social change. By developing various educational programs such as academic service learning programs, universities prepare students not only for a business career, but also for active participation in activities which bring better future to their community. Wesheimer (2008), however, points out that many education institutions still do not understand their role in building "the good citizen". Most of them, according to Wesheimer still succumb to pressure of students' and their parents to prepare them for professional career, personal growth and economic gain neglecting the importance for creating an active and engaged citizens as well. However purely academic education in itself is not enough. Universities must create programs and projects that will emphasize the practical side of learning and participate in creating

an entrepreneurial and stimulating environment in which both students as individuals and universities as institution play an important role as agents of positive social changes.

2. What is social responsibility?

Creation of common good used to be considered an obligation of the state and volunteers, but today other sectors are playing an increasingly important role in improving the quality of life of their communities (David Murrasse, 2004). Social responsibility is becoming a more desirable form of doing business because success of organizations no longer depends solely on the market aspects. Organizations no longer take into account only the economic viability of the business; a socially responsible organization takes care of all its stakeholders (employees, investors, suppliers, financial institutions, final users of products and/or services, etc.) and of the community in which it operates (the environment and solving various problems of the community).

There are many different definitions and understandings of the concept of social responsibility. However, in order to develop social responsibility in terms of attitudes and values of the individual, the individual should be the starting point. The concept of individual social responsibility is not mentioned as frequently as corporate social responsibility but, nevertheless, is the basis for active participation of each individual and for solving problems in their immediate environment, which is comprised of their family and friends.

Cabahug (2009) argues that it is not necessary for an individual to belong to a corporation, institution or organization to meet the standards of socially responsible behavior. A community is composed of a set of individuals, and in order for it to develop, it is necessary that those individuals are socially conscious and responsible towards the society, which is the essence of their existence. Stengel (2010) believes that the definition of social responsibility must contain the foundations of both individual and corporate responsibility, since both, including a large number of institutions of other sectors, such as academia, state and the civil sector have an obligation to the community in which they live and work.

Nobel Prize winner Milton Friedman (1970) bases his theory on social responsibility on the thesis that only individuals separately can (and should) feel social responsibility towards the community and the people with whom they live. But when it comes to the business sector, Friedman believes that their only responsibility is to increase their profits, or to satisfy the interests of their investors. Accordingly, although corporations have to meet the conditions and laws of the country in which they operate, they do not have a direct obligation towards the community and society. Friedman believes that corporations, acting within the law,

are inherently socially responsible because by increasing their profits they are creating thousands of new jobs (directly or indirectly through clients, retailers, distributors and suppliers), and are improving the lives of a large number of customers with their products and services.

Unlike Friedman, Murrasse (2004) believes that social responsibility of the corporation is reflected in sacrificing of its profits for the social good, and in order to achieve that corporation has to operate outside the context of its legal and business framework. Murrasse sees these frameworks in various behaviors of corporations, such as friendly relationship with employees, supporting the code of ethics, focusing on environmentally conscious business, respecting the community where the business is located, etc. Beverley Hughes (2007) especially emphasizes the importance of developing social responsibility in young people. According to Hughes, the young people today, more than ever before, are faced with inexhaustible sources of possibilities and choices on the one hand, and with changes, risks and challenges brought by the increasingly uncertain and complex environment, on the other hand. The development of social responsibility on young people can be accomplished through continuous education, encouraging of proactive behavior, and focusing their energy, optimism and initiative to utilization of their own potential. As educational institutions, universities have an increasingly important role in that process.

3. Socially responsible university

“Educating for personal and social responsibility will take nothing less than a persuasive cultural shift within the academy“

Richard H. Hersh

Universities are becoming more and more important participants in the creation of sustainable social development, because connecting the learning process with economic activities can affect the creation of sustainable dynamics of economic and social development of the community in which the university works (Etzkowitz, 2002). This connection of university with the community is a characteristic of the third mission of universities through which, according to numerous authors (Etzkowitz, 2002; Inzelt et al., 2007), universities follow the market trends, develop programs that meet the demands of the environment and focus on integrating their characteristics and programs into economy and society.

Monica Jimenez de la Jara¹ (2007) defines social responsibility of university as the ability to disseminate and practice a set of principles and values through four key

¹ Monica Jimenez de la Jara, Rector of the Catholic University from Temuco, Chile, <http://web.guni2005.upc.es/news/detail.php?chlang=en&id=1135>; (accessed 13 February, 2012)

activities: management, education, research and additional activities. She believes that universities should base their academic and organizational responsibility on ethical concepts that will correspond with satisfying the needs of community in which they operate. According to Jimenez de la Jara, social responsibility of university must not represent an additional extracurricular activity. Universities have to be responsible on a daily basis, and social responsibility must be part of their personality, ethos and existence. Vasilescu et al. (2010) state that social responsibility of university is reflected in the need to strengthen civic responsibility and active citizenship and in volunteering, ethical approach, developing a sense of civic citizenship by encouraging students and academic staff to provide social services to its local community or to promote commitment to local and global sustainable development based on preservation of the environment.

Goossen (2009) points out that universities can chose whether they want to be followers, or use the opportunity and become leaders by accepting the concept of corporate social responsibility in their operations. Leitão and Silva (2007) believe that by implementing corporate social responsibility universities enable development of awareness and understanding of social responsibility among students, professors and the wider network of university stakeholders. According to Vanasupa, Slikovsky and Chen (2006) development of awareness of social responsibility complements “technical education“ and encourages the ability to act and the awareness of the need to act. Built relationships with the community and implementing the elements of corporate social responsibility create conditions for successful adapting to change and developing awareness of the importance of active involvement in positive social activities.

Patrick Albrecht (2005) also believes that universities have the main role in the process of social transformation and creation of sustainable development. However, many universities do not feel the pressure of institutional transformation that is carried by the modern society. According to Albrecht, these are mostly state universities, which think that, given that they serve the public by definition, they do not need to additionally invest in socially responsible behavior. Atkinson and Gilleland (2006) state that many authors (Durvey, 1973, Birnbaum 2000, Wick, 1976, Mintzberg, 1979) consider universities dysfunctional, fragmented, ambiguous, archaic, poorly connected and poorly coordinated. According to Codes and March (2000, cited by Atkinson and Gilleland, 2006), universities should be an integral part of the community, think outside of the context of rational and bureaucratic model, devote more time to complex problems, and be more persistent in seeking better solutions. The Parliamentary Council of Europe also sees universities as an integral part of the community. Universities should take into account the short-term needs and demands of the community, but, while doing so, they must not forget their third mission, which is manifested in the creation of long-term partnership and finding solutions to fundamental problems of the society.

Despite the clear role of universities in the development of economic and social sustainability, many universities fail to respond to challenges and demands posed by their environment. On the one hand, Weber believes that the reason for this is the indifference of universities towards the norms and values that enable the individual to feel like a part of the community. Their indifference lies in the fact that, for universities, these same values and norms represent something that should be accepted by everyone, and therefore there is no need to repeat or promote them. On the other hand, many universities believe that they are already operating in the manner that is expected from them, and that there is no space for new activities. These attitudes inhibit development of long-term responsibility of university, and Weber sees one of the best ways for universities to change in stimulating higher education institutions (through financial or other incentives) to, through education and research, invest into those activities that will be aimed at promoting a sustainable society and connecting with various interdisciplinary academic activities.

4. Development of Universities' Social Responsibility through Academic service learning programs

Through social responsibility, universities directly affect the development of active civil society by developing understanding of the importance of social awareness of each actor of the society and by encouraging young people to actively participate in the creation of a democratic society.

Cecilia Zaffaroni (cited by Jimenez de la Jara, 2007) believes that the importance of social responsibility of university increases by educating students about values and norms in the society, by encouraging students to understand the needs of the community in which they live, by educating students about their role as democratic citizens, by involving students in various projects, aimed at solving community problems, and by involving students, together with all the other university stakeholders in various volunteering activities and projects. One of the ways of involving students in various activities is through academic service learning programs, experiential education approach that is premised on "reciprocal learning" which means that both those who provide service and those who received it "learn from experience" (Sigmon, 1979 in Furco, 1996). The term "service learning" was developed in 1967 by Robert Sigmon and William Ramsey, members of Southern Regional Education Board (Ćulum and Ledić, 2010). In 1979 and in 1989 Honnet and Poulsen, as consultants of the National Society for Experiential Education, developed the service learning model and the set of *Principles of Good Practice in Combining Service and Learning* (Honnet and Poulsen, 1989).

In 1990, National and Community Service Act defined service learning program as a method²:

1. under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs and that are coordinated in collaboration with the school and community;
2. that is integrated into the student's academic curriculum or provides structured time for a student to think, talk, or write about what the student did and saw during the actual activity;
3. that provides students with opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities; and
4. that enhances what is taught in school by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community and helps to foster the development of a sense of caring for others.

This Act represented a significant push to various debates about civil social responsibility of youth and educational institution towards their community, as well as significant support towards creating a model that will evaluate and give credit to those students involved in activities aimed at solving community's problems.

According to Howard (1998 in Stacey, Dale and Langer, 2006) academic service learning programs offer students a different experience than the traditional learning methods because the outcomes of academic service learning programs influence not only students but the whole community (Figure 1):

FIGURE 1: Difference between traditional teaching methods and service learning program

Traditional teaching method	Academic service learning program
Theory	Theory and experience
Other people's knowledge	Personal knowledge
Observer	Participant
Individual learning	Mutual learning
Difference between teachers and students	Relieves the difference between teachers and students
Answers	Questions and answers
Complete predictability of outcome	Unpredictability of outcomes
homogeneous outcomes	Heterogeneous outcomes
Avoiding ignorance	Ignorance is a resource
Objectivist epistemology	Connectionist/feminist epistemology

Source: Stacey, K., Rice, D., Langer, G. (1997): **Academic Service Learning**, *Faculty Development Manual*. Ypsilanti, Eastern Michigan University, Office of Academic Service Learning

² <http://learningtogive.org/papers/paper1.html>, (accessed 24 February 2012)

Unlike traditional education service learning programs support students to experience a learning and growth opportunity through three steps where each step in the process leads to another and can be accomplished by answering three simple questions:³

- a) WHAT has happened? - Get students' initial observation of what has happened:
 - What did I observe during my first visit?
 - What is the community partner's mission or goal?
 - Describe the people you worked with at the community site.
 - What roles did I play at the site?
 - What about myself did I share with others?
 - What did others share with me?;
- b) SO WHAT? - Students must show the importance of a program, learning experience and problems
 - What are the relationship between my community service experience and my other life experiences?
 - What values, opinions, decisions have been made or changed through this experience?
 - What has surprised me about the community site, the people I work with, and myself?
 - How has your experience contributed to your growth in any of these areas: civic responsibility, political consciousness, professional development, spiritual fulfillment, social understanding, intellectual pursuit, or global citizenship?
 - What have you learned about a particular community or societal issue?
 - Describe and discuss a social problem that you have come into contact with during your experience. What do you think are the root causes of this problem?
 - Explain how your involvement may or may not contribute to its alleviation
- c) NOW WHAT? - How to channel students' new understanding into continued action and transformation
 - Is it important to me to stay involved in the community?
 - How will my efforts working with this community partner contribute to social change? My career? What changes would I make in this experience if it were repeated?
 - Will I continue to do this?

³https://reason.kzoo.edu/servicelearning/assets/WHAT_So_WHAT_NOW_WHAT.pdf, (accessed 24 February 2012)

- How do we take what we have learned and convert it into action in the community we're working in?
- How can society be more compassionate/informed/involved regarding this community?
- How can society better deal with a problem?
- Where do we go from here? What's the next step in the process?

Service learning programs, although they might be different in praxis, have the same components: (a) Pedagogy embracing **experiential** and **reflective** education, (b) Intentionally **integrate** academic learning and relevant community service, (c) **Reciprocal** collaboration between campus and community partners, (d) Purpose is to **enhance** learning and never to compromise academic **rigor**, (e) include **structured** time for critical reflection.⁴ All of those components enable students to convert gained knowledge into solutions to actual community problems and give them an opportunity to become active socially responsible citizens.

5. Case of J.J. Strossmayer University in Osijek, Faculty of Economics in Osijek

In Croatia, only a few universities encourage active involvement of students in solving the problems of the community, most often through various volunteer activities, and rarely through courses or programs that have markings of learning programs. Faculty of Economics in Osijek is the first faculty in Croatia that has developed a Voluntary Program with an aim to raise student's awareness about the meaning and importance of volunteering and active community involvement. One of the major activities of this program is the project "**Contribution to the Community**" which indicates the elements of service learning program. The "Contribution to the Community" project was designed as a mandatory part of the Entrepreneurial Skills I course, at undergraduate study Entrepreneurship, without which students cannot receive their final grade. The aim of this project is to enable students to identify needs and opportunities for personal involvement in resolving problems of the environment, and to make them aware that in allocation of personal time they can always find room for socially responsible activities. Within this project, around 60 undergraduate students each year have the opportunity to experience real-life problems and be a part of their solutions. As in an academic service learning program, the Entrepreneurial Skills I course teaches students about important components of entrepreneurial behavior and competences such as development of self-awareness, learning how to learn, managing stress, analytical and creative problem solving and development of stimulating communication.

⁴ **Course Instructor Guide, Service-Learning Pedagogy Resource**, Assisting People in Planning Learning Experiences in Service, www.unc.edu/apples, February 1, 2012

Having learned about developing those competences in the classroom, students have to spend a minimum of 20 hours in the community (mostly within civil society organizations) and apply the acquired knowledge in their practical work. Students also need to write a report “Strategy for strengthening entrepreneurial skills through the Contribution to the Community project”, with which they show how they have applied what they have learned in a real-life situation and what they have learn about themselves, what needs to be improved, and could they and how did they impact the organization that they have worked for, and even their community.

6. Concluding Remarks

The complexity of modern society and a profound crisis of morals and values, which especially affects young people, highlight the great need for creating a new generation of people who will direct their knowledge and skills not only to their personal growth and development, but also to satisfy community's demands, recognizing and using opportunities to solve serious social problems. Therefore, it is important that universities base their socially responsible actions on encouraging the development of academic service learning programs and social activism among young people. Individual initiatives which aim to develop models to encourage critical thinking, proactivity and innovativeness in the process of solving real social problems are always welcomed but there still is a need for more structured projects and programs that will strengthen relationships between universities and local communities, and develop a sense in young people that with their active participation they can make a positive change and influence the lives of others in the community.

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