

## A New Communication Form of Higher Education: University Social Responsibility and Its Visibility on Web Sites

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### ABSTRACT:

*Universities worldwide have begun to acknowledge the significance of civic engagement and incorporate their campuses and communities into these programs. Consequently, social responsibility is increasingly acknowledged as a fundamental element of the higher education system, particularly inside institutions. The World Conference on Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century, formulated at the 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in Paris, along with the Communication from the 2009 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education, adheres to the principles of the 1998 Declaration and the objectives outlined in the Bologna Process, all underscore the increasing acknowledgment of social responsibility as a fundamental aspect of universities. This study will first present the conceptual framework of social responsibility to elucidate the transition from corporate social responsibility to university social responsibility. It will also examine colleges as a unique entity that requires the adoption of a social responsibility plan. This will be accomplished by examining the literature on the notion of University Social Responsibility (USR). The study subsequently examines the official websites of 21 state and private universities in the capital city of Turkey, to assess the prominence of social responsibility programs. Consequently, a few universities exhibit their social responsibility practices on their websites.*

### KEYWORDS

University Social Responsibility, Sustainable Societal Communication, Higher Education, Civic Engagement, Official Web Sites.

### Introduction:

In the post-COVID-19 era, the role of higher education institutions has been under renewed scrutiny as they confront intensified global challenges. Today's youth face daunting economic realities: increasing unemployment, enduring job losses, and widening inequality [1]. While a university degree traditionally promised career stability, today's economic landscape demands more from educational institutions. People now expect universities not only to educate but also to develop graduates' ability to navigate complex societal issues, equipping them for active roles as responsible citizens. The rising expectation has resulted in increased focus on University Social Responsibility (USR), a concept that expands upon Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) by broadening the ethical duties of educational institutions to encompass the broader community [2]. USR, conceptualized as an academic extension of CSR, emphasizes universities' societal impact [3] [4]. Recent works, such as Shek and Hollister [5], further explore its implications for student development. This

framework urges universities to contribute to social improvement by providing students with opportunities to engage with real-world problems and encouraging them to make meaningful contributions to their communities.

Similar to CSR, USR incorporates ethical considerations specifically designed for the academic context. Initially focused on the economic and environmental responsibilities of corporations, CSR has evolved into a model for various sectors, including education. Within academia, USR serves as a guiding principle for universities, emphasizing a commitment to stakeholders beyond their immediate academic community. This includes not only students and staff but also local communities, government bodies, and society at large. Concepts like "civic engagement," "community outreach," and "public engagement" capture various facets of university involvement in societal development, as higher education institutions increasingly recognize their potential to address societal needs [6]. By aligning with these principles, universities acknowledge their influence as societal actors and leverage their resources to effect positive change [3].

The impact of USR initiatives is particularly evident in fostering civic engagement, a core value that reinforces individuals' involvement in public life. Civic engagement includes activities ranging from community service and social media activism to policy advocacy, each geared toward enhancing societal welfare [7]. Longstanding theories of social responsibility and stakeholder involvement link higher education's emphasis on civic engagement. Scholars have argued that universities, as institutions of knowledge, bear a responsibility to encourage active citizenship, addressing social issues in a way that extends beyond traditional academic objectives [8] [9]. By doing so, universities aim to cultivate students' civic awareness, preparing them to become conscientious and involved citizens. Many aspects of university life, from coursework to community partnerships, incorporate this sense of responsibility, underscoring the importance of preparing students not only as professionals but also as ethical, socially aware individuals [10].

USR frameworks vary significantly across educational systems. For instance, Turkish universities emphasize aligning academic learning with practical societal applications, as noted by Belyaeva et al., [11] while global models like the Talloires Declaration (1990) advocate for integrating sustainability into higher education. Turkey has seen a growing emphasis on integrating social responsibility into university curricula, with several institutions establishing dedicated centers for it. This reflects a broader commitment within Turkish higher education to engage students with the needs of society, aligning academic learning with practical, real-world applications [11]. Turkish universities thus serve as catalysts for social change, building networks that foster community involvement and offering support to social stakeholders in addressing pressing societal challenges. This research examines USR within the Turkish context by analyzing the official websites of 21 universities in Ankara, both public and private. By focusing on online visibility, this study explores how these institutions frame and promote their social responsibility initiatives, providing insights into their commitment to social and civic engagement.

The choice to investigate universities in Ankara stems from the city's strategic importance as Turkey's capital and its role as a hub for higher education. The selected universities represent a range of institutional types and sizes, offering a comprehensive overview of how Turkish universities approach USR. This study seeks to answer several critical questions: To what extent are social responsibility initiatives prominently displayed on university websites? How do universities communicate their commitment to civic engagement and community involvement to the public? What are the prioritized forms of social responsibility, and how do these efforts align with the wider objectives of civic participation and social welfare? These questions are fundamental to understanding how Turkish universities view their role within society and how they seek to influence the civic consciousness of their students.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the literature on USR by offering an in-depth look at how universities in Turkey address social responsibility. From a practical perspective, these insights could guide policymakers, educators, and university administrators in enhancing USR frameworks within academic institutions. The analysis of social responsibility visibility on university websites provides a window into how these institutions define and prioritize their societal roles, potentially setting standards for other universities seeking to expand their civic engagement initiatives. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of digital platforms in promoting USR, as websites serve as accessible portals through which universities can communicate their values, objectives, and societal contributions [12].

In conclusion, as societal expectations for higher education evolve, so does the role of universities in promoting social responsibility and civic engagement. Turkish universities, through their integration of USR into curricula and campus life, are contributing to this global trend, positioning themselves as essential contributors to societal welfare. By examining

these institutions' online representations of USR, this research aims to shed light on the broader implications of USR in fostering civic-minded, socially responsible graduates. This study not only enriches our understanding of USR in Turkey but also offers a model for other universities globally, emphasizing the importance of transparency and engagement in achieving sustainable societal impact.

### 1) Literature Review:

USR adapts ethical considerations from CSR to the academic context. Initially focused on the economic and environmental responsibilities of corporations, CSR has evolved into a model for various sectors, including education. Within academia, USR serves as a guiding principle for universities, emphasizing a commitment to stakeholders beyond their immediate academic community. This includes not only students and staff but also local communities, government bodies, and society at large. Concepts like "civic engagement," "community outreach," and "public engagement" capture various facets of university involvement in societal development, as higher education institutions increasingly recognize their potential to address societal needs [6]. By aligning with these principles, universities acknowledge their influence as societal actors and leverage their resources to effect positive change [3]. The impact of USR initiatives is particularly evident in fostering civic engagement, a core value that reinforces individuals' involvement in public life. Civic engagement includes activities ranging from community service and social media activism to policy advocacy, each geared toward enhancing societal welfare [7]. Longstanding theories of social responsibility and stakeholder involvement link higher education's emphasis on civic engagement. Scholars have argued that universities, as institutions of knowledge, bear a responsibility to encourage active citizenship, addressing social issues in a way that extends beyond traditional academic objectives [8] [9]. By doing so, universities aim to cultivate students' civic awareness, preparing them to become conscientious and involved citizens.

Many aspects of university life, from coursework to community partnerships, incorporate this sense of responsibility, underscoring the importance of preparing students not only as professionals but also as ethical, socially aware individuals [10]. USR frameworks vary across educational systems, with Turkish universities providing a unique perspective on social responsibility in higher education. Turkey has seen a growing emphasis on integrating social responsibility into university curricula, with several institutions establishing dedicated centers for it. This reflects a broader commitment within Turkish higher education to engage students with the needs of society, aligning academic learning with practical, real-world applications [11]. Turkish universities thus serve as catalysts for social change, building networks that foster community involvement and offering support to social stakeholders in addressing pressing societal challenges. This research examines USR within the Turkish context by analyzing the official websites of 21 universities in Ankara, both public and private. By focusing on online visibility, this study explores how these institutions frame and promote their social responsibility initiatives, providing insights into their commitment to social and civic engagement. The choice to investigate universities in Ankara stems from the city's strategic importance as Turkey's capital and its role as a hub for higher education. The selected universities represent a range of institutional types and sizes, offering a comprehensive overview of how Turkish universities approach USR.

This study seeks to answer several critical questions: To what extent are social responsibility initiatives prominently displayed on university websites? How do universities communicate their commitment to civic engagement and community involvement to the public? What are the prioritized forms of social responsibility, and how do these efforts align with the wider objectives of civic participation and social welfare? These questions are fundamental to understanding how Turkish universities view their role within society and how they seek to influence the civic consciousness of their students. We expect the findings of this study to enhance the literature on USR by providing a comprehensive understanding of how Turkish universities tackle social responsibility. From a practical perspective, these insights could guide policymakers, educators, and university administrators in enhancing USR frameworks within academic institutions. The analysis of social responsibility visibility on university websites provides a window into how these institutions define and prioritize their societal roles, potentially setting standards for other universities seeking to expand their civic engagement initiatives. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of digital platforms in promoting USR, as websites serve as accessible portals through which universities can communicate their values, objectives, and societal contributions [12]. In conclusion, as societal expectations for higher education evolve, so does the role of universities in promoting social responsibility and civic engagement. Turkish universities, through their integration of USR into curricula and campus life, are contributing to this global trend, positioning themselves as essential contributors to societal welfare. By examining these institutions' online representations of USR, this research aims to shed light on the broader implications of USR in fostering civic-minded, socially responsible graduates. This study not only enriches our understanding of USR in Turkey but also offers a model for other universities globally, emphasizing the importance of transparency and engagement in achieving sustainable societal impact.

### (a) A Comprehensive Review of University Social Responsibility

Since the 2000s, the understanding and practices of social responsibility (SR) have expanded beyond the scope of corporate social responsibility (CSR), which refers to institutional and corporate practices, and have increasingly found a place, particularly in higher education institutions, as university social responsibility (USR). Therefore, the concept of university social responsibility (USR) should be examined primarily through the definition of social responsibility and corporate social responsibility, the evaluation of their scope and limitations, and the discussion of best practices and challenges in the field.

The concept of responsibility generally refers to the acceptance and assumption of the moral, legal, and economic consequences arising from an action, behavior, or decision within the individual and/or institutional sphere of authority [13]. Historically, the principle of individual responsibility gained a new dimension through the transformation of economic systems, urbanization, and globalization discourses. In this context, the concept of responsibility emerged from 19th-century philanthropic practices and evolved to emphasize business life, institutional practices, and management processes [14]. Bowen's (1953) work *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman* first introduced the institutional interpretation of the concept of social responsibility in the literature, framing it as a management policy within the context of business leaders' decisions and responsibilities [15]. Contemporary discussions understand corporate social responsibility as the voluntary and discretionary societal contribution practices and public benefit obligations that organizations carry out through the utilization of their resources. Upon reviewing these traditional definitions of social responsibility and/or corporate social responsibility, it becomes evident that this understanding is predominantly organization-centric, founded on a voluntary basis at the discretion of the organization, shaped by the activities of stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, shareholders, and investors, and ultimately linked to the goal of profit maximization [16]. The European Commission (2011) highlights the responsibility of businesses regarding their impact on society within the concept of corporate social responsibility [17]. These inherent limitations have consequently led to a critique of the traditional understanding of social responsibility and/or corporate social responsibility. As an alternative approach, the social responsibility of non-profit organizations and, within this framework, higher education institutions have emerged as a topic of growing interest [18].

A general definition of the concept of University Social Responsibility (USR) corresponds to the entirety of the actors, structures, and relationships for which universities are responsible, within the framework of "professional education," "responsible campus," "public knowledge," and "social engagement" [19]. This context evaluates not only the definition of USR, but also its scope and the nature of responsibility. Universities must adopt ethical responsibility in their academic and organizational practices, including education, administration, research, and community outreach, while paying attention to the environment and external stakeholders. Furthermore, routine practices should prioritize human, democratic, social, and ecological values. In other words, USR is defined as "social responsibility active awareness," which places responsible and sustainable practices, regularly integrated into the daily routines of educational processes, research, campus operations, and societal engagement, at the core of management processes within universities [4]. From this perspective, the USR approach serves as a guide for all actors, students, researchers, faculty members, administrators, and local communities—to understand the role of universities in achieving sustainable development. Currently, numerous internationally recognized documents and agreements declare the significance of the USR concept and the social responsibility practices of universities [20].

Prioritization of social responsibility practices in universities became possible with the emergence of various international initiatives and collaborations since the 1990s. The early examples of this process include the establishment of associations like the Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF) and the International Association of Universities (IAU), as well as their commitment to agreements like the Talloires Declaration (1990) and the Declaration of Halifax (1991). Similarly, agreements and partnerships such as the UN's Agenda 21 (1992) and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) have brought the inclusion of university strategic plans, actions, and collaboration networks to the forefront. The establishment of networks like the European university cooperation network COPERNICUS and the Global Higher Education Partnership for Sustainability (GHEPS), developed through collaborations with ULSF, IAU, and UNESCO, resulted in the Lüneburg Declaration (2001), which aims to integrate education and sustainability. The United Nations, in its Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014), emphasized the strategic foresight and ethical responsibility of higher education institutions in educating citizens and

raising awareness on sustainable development issues [21]. Indeed, the UN Global Compact, through the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME, 2007), developed by university and industry representatives, proposes an integration that considers social, environmental, and stakeholder interaction [18].

Universities have implemented the "Sustainable Development Goals," established by the United Nations on September 25, 2015, at the Sustainable Development Summit, in their instructional, research, management, and social responsibility activities in response to current occurrences. As highlighted in the UN's Agenda 2030 report (UN, 2015), universities play a pivotal role in integrating Sustainable Development Goals into their operational frameworks. Institutions like Aalborg University have already set benchmarks in this area [11]. In this context, universities are expected to consider goals such as the eradication of poverty, quality education, reduction of inequalities, decent work and economic growth, gender equality, sustainable cities and communities, and peace, justice, and strong institutions in all activities they undertake.

In this context, it's crucial to discuss the ongoing civil initiatives that foster ideas, projects, and collaborations at both local and global levels in the context of university social responsibility. One example of such efforts is *Taylor's Community*, developed by Taylor's Education Group as a corporate social responsibility project. This initiative exemplifies the integration of education and higher education research with social responsibility practices. As a corporate social responsibility project, it is based on volunteerism and emphasizes a multi-dimensional understanding of social benefit, incorporating values such as diversity, equality, and inclusivity. Three approaches fundamentally link the organizational network of the project to education and social responsibility: analyzing areas of need (such as women's empowerment, urban poverty, improving educational opportunities, etc.), fostering collaboration with stakeholders through corporate social responsibility programs, measuring and reporting project outcomes, and supporting personal development of volunteers through societal contribution activities. According to Taylor's Community's 2023 annual report, the project planned five programs that involved 775 participants and 489 hours of comprehensive training [22].

A board comprising rectors, education ministers, and student representatives governs the Talloires Network of Participating Universities, a global collaboration structure that hosts 443 institutions from 91 countries. This large international network strengthens universities' social responsibility by focusing on their roles in civil engagement, with values such as "leadership," "equality," "inclusivity," and "collaboration." The network aims to raise awareness about universities' public benefit-oriented work, secure public support for civil participation initiatives, establish communication with new members and network partners, reinforce critical thinking by forming an international community of practice, and financially support innovative approaches to university civil engagement. The network includes collaborations with countries such as Australia, Chile, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Ireland, Pakistan, Scotland, Spain, Uganda, the United States, and Zimbabwe [23].

A more recent example of such global collaborations is the *University Social Responsibility Network (USRN)*. This network emphasizes the need to redefine the functions of universities, such as knowledge production, education, management, and public services, with a social responsibility framework that contributes to societal well-being and transforms the traditional mission of universities. Founded in 2015, the USRN was designed to facilitate the exchange of ideas, resources, and practices to address global economic, social, cultural, and environmental challenges; establish solutions for a more equitable, inclusive, peaceful, and sustainable world; and guide the global discourse and development of USR in higher education [24].

The network endorses the book *University Social Responsibility and Quality of Life* (2017), which provides a critical analysis of university social responsibility in three principal domains: linking USR to societal issues and their resolutions, broadening educational access, and improving students' education in social responsibility. This study analyzes several production options, including local and worldwide contexts, social, ethical, economic, and socio-cultural conditions, alongside partnerships, programs, and projects [5]. In another recent academic publication, Palacio and Sadehvandi (2022) discuss a project in which universities in the USRN network came together to create a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) aimed at increasing awareness of the USR concept and promoting effective strategies for civil participation [25].

The University of Pretoria and USRN, in addition to their current publications, hosted the "University Social Responsibility: Priorities for the Next Decade" virtual summit, which facilitated discussions on adopting academic responsibility, public benefit, and the social responsibilities of students and staff as part of universities' mission and future goals (University World News, 2021). By 2022, the International USR Summit (USRN, 2022) further fostered sustainable

awareness in the field through paper presentations. Moreover, reports on the visibility efforts of various universities towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) incorporate their social responsibility activities (University of Manchester, 2021; University of Iceland, 2022).

#### **(b) University Social Responsibility and Official Web Sites**

In the discussions surrounding the concept of university social responsibility outlined above, it is evident that official university websites play a crucial role as a key resource in acquiring up-to-date information on collaborations with higher education institutions, reports, and the universities' projects and practices. University websites serve as a bridging tool for communicating social responsibility practices to stakeholders, offering sustainable environmental interactions, and contributing to societal benefit actions through the social impact they generate. Although, While university websites are considered effective tools for bridging communication with stakeholders [26], critics argue that limited accessibility and vague content often diminish their impact [27]. In this context, institutional websites ensure the visibility of a broad university social responsibility practice that includes improving welfare, minimizing negative environmental, social, and economic impacts, protecting nature and resources, leading the community in sustainability efforts, and supporting the resource and accessibility needs of various societal groups. These websites also support the interaction of educational processes and actors with stakeholders. As such, official university websites are considered both part of corporate social responsibility practices and a reliable, updated information source that enhances visibility for existing planning, practices, and future strategies in this field, functioning as an "official business card."

On university websites, social responsibility can be tracked and analyzed through various categories, such as the institution's mission and vision definitions, social responsibility reports and archival records, the presence of social responsibility centers or student communities dedicated to social responsibility, as well as projects carried out in this area and efforts to ensure their visibility. Nejati et al. (2011) conducted a study that examined universities' social responsibility efforts through their websites, selecting seven key CSR areas based on the guiding principles outlined in the ISO 26000 draft (ISO/DIS 26000, 2009), including corporate governance, community participation, human rights, fair business practices, and the environment. Using content analysis, the websites of the world's top ten universities (Harvard University, University of Cambridge, Yale University, University of Oxford, University of Chicago, Princeton University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, etc.) were examined. The study found that the websites of all the top ten universities reflected their engagement in social responsibility and sustainability efforts [26]. Similar studies [27] [28] [29] also highlight the importance of university websites as a key connection point for university social responsibility and sustainability, emphasizing their role in facilitating stakeholder communication and advancing social development goals. Universities, as sensitive, participatory, and responsible organizations addressing societal issues, play a crucial role beyond education and research. In this context, making social responsibility projects more visible and providing simple access to them strengthens the mission of higher education institutions in creating social value.

The visibility of social responsibility projects on university websites and their accessibility through search buttons reflect the transparency of universities and their willingness to share them with society. It also demonstrates the qualitative contribution of these efforts to societal benefit. Some universities highlight social responsibility projects on their websites, creating an archive of current work in this field and planning future projects as part of their strategic planning processes and vision for the coming years. For instance, when examining the official website of the University of Manchester, the "social responsibility" section under the "About" tab outlines that the university approaches social responsibility in an integrated manner, encompassing not only teaching and learning activities but also research, public engagement, and the development of positive societal and environmental practices. The university's vision and strategic planning processes establish this perspective as a goal, and national civic engagement organizations like the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) support it. On the other hand, it is clear that this social responsibility vision is also considered a significant ranking criterion through global university ranking systems (e.g., QS World University Sustainability Rankings, Times Higher Education Impact) [30].

However, in some universities, such social responsibility initiatives and/or their visibility remain relatively limited. A review of the literature on university social responsibility discussions in Turkey reveals a relatively small number of studies [31] [32] [33]. A similar trend is observed in the visibility of social responsibility activities on university websites,

especially in institutions other than a select few. Therefore, it is crucial to raise awareness about this issue and support both applied and academic work pertaining to university social responsibility in Turkey.

## 2) Methods and Methodology:

Using the framework from the theoretical review section as a guide, this study uses a quantitative research method called content analysis to look at how visible corporate social responsibility (CSR) approaches, practices, and future plans are on the official websites of 21 universities in Ankara, Turkey. These universities have two different types of statuses: public and private (foundation).

In this context, a coding framework was developed, and the demographic data of the universities included in the study, such as their founding year and whether they are public or private, were examined. Following this, data were coded to determine whether mission and vision statements included keywords reflecting social responsibility and whether student communities, social responsibility centers, or projects related to this field were present.

After providing information on the universities' founding dates and the distinction between public and private types, the study evaluated how universities reflect their understanding of social responsibility on their websites. This involved first checking whether social responsibility was mentioned in the universities' vision and mission statements. Additionally, data on whether a direct "social responsibility" section or a shortcut to this section existed in the search buttons, as well as the accessibility of projects, were also included in the coding framework and analyzed. The visibility of social responsibility centers and student communities has also been examined within this scope. A detailed table of the findings is presented in Appendix-1.

## 4) Results:

In recent years, universities have recognized the importance of integrating social responsibility within their institutional frameworks, particularly through mission statements, student societies, and dedicated centers. This research focuses on the visibility of social responsibility among universities in Turkey, analyzing the presence of social responsibility elements on their official websites and assessing the accessibility of social responsibility initiatives for public engagement. Ankara was chosen as the sample. While there are 21 universities in Ankara, there are 13 foundations and 8 state universities. By evaluating key factors such as mission and vision statements, student societies, and the presence of dedicated centers, this study aims to elucidate the extent to which these universities promote social responsibility in their public representation.

### a) Mission and Vision Statements

Mission and vision statements are foundational components of an institution's identity and values, often reflecting its commitment to broader societal goals. The analysis of Ankara's universities reveals a mixed approach to explicitly incorporating social responsibility within these statements. About the social responsibility mentioned in mission/vision, it is concluded that 9 universities emphasize social responsibility in their mission-vision; however, 12 universities do not have this visibility. And it can be said that this visibility is higher in public universities (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Social Responsibility Mentioned in Mission/Vision

Social Responsibility Mentioned in Mission/Vision			TOTAL
Yes	Public	6	9
	Foundation	3	
No	Public	2	12
	Foundation	10	

While some universities (3 foundation and 3 state universities), such as Ankara Bilim University, make a direct reference to social responsibility on their websites (e.g., "Vision and Mission" section on [ankarabilim.edu.tr](http://ankarabilim.edu.tr)), others either do not mention social responsibility or have limited visibility of such commitments. There is no reference to social responsibility in the missions and visions of 12 of 21 universities. This inconsistency suggests varying degrees of priority placed on

social responsibility within the institutional ethos and raises questions about the role of mission and vision statements in promoting social responsibility values across Turkish higher education.

### b) Student Societies

Student societies play a significant role in engaging students with social responsibility initiatives and fostering a culture of civic involvement. These societies often organize events, campaigns, and volunteer opportunities that allow students to actively participate in community-oriented projects. A different situation is observed under the heading of social responsibility student societies. Among the universities reviewed, there is a range of social responsibility-focused student societies. 12 out of 21 universities have these societies. Of these, 6 are state universities and 6 are foundation universities. A total of 9 universities, 7 of which are foundation universities, do not have a social responsibility student society (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Social Responsibility Student Societies

Social Responsibility Student Societies			TOTAL
Yes	Public	6	12
	Foundation	6	
No	Public	2	9
	Foundation	7	

For instance, Ankara Bilim University hosts the "Social Responsibility and Awareness Society," which serves as a platform for student-led social responsibility activities. However, not all universities have such societies prominently featured on their websites, indicating a potential gap in the promotion of student-led social responsibility initiatives. There are student societies related to social responsibility in 6 foundation universities and 6 state universities. 12 out of 21 universities have student societies related to social responsibility. The visibility of these societies is crucial, as they serve as accessible entry points for students to contribute to societal well-being and cultivate social awareness.

### c) Social Responsibility Center

Dedicated centers for social responsibility underscore a university's commitment to institutionalizing social responsibility values and providing structured support for social responsibility activities. Regarding whether universities have dedicated social responsibility centers, it was observed that only three universities (Ankara, Bilkent, Hacettepe) within the scope of the research have such centers. Two of these are public universities and one is a foundation university. 18 universities do not have a social responsibility center (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Dedicated Social Responsibility Center

Dedicated Social Responsibility Center			TOTAL
Yes	Public	2	3
	Foundation	1	
No	Public	6	18
	Foundation	12	

However, the data indicate that only Hacettepe University, Ankara University and İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University in Ankara have established these centers, with many universities lacking such formal structures. Only three of 21 universities have social responsibility centers. For example, some institutions explicitly state the absence of social responsibility centers on their websites. The lack of dedicated social responsibility centers may suggest limited institutional support for comprehensive, large-scale social responsibility initiatives, potentially affecting the overall impact and sustainability of social responsibility efforts within these universities. Establishing such centers could enhance universities' capacity to manage and expand social responsibility activities, thereby strengthening their role as agents of positive social change.



#### d) The Visibility and Accessibility of Social Responsibility Activities

The visibility of social responsibility activities on university websites is essential for public engagement, as it reflects transparency and openness to societal needs. In the social responsibility projects visibility on web site section, it was found that 11 universities in the study shared such studies, while 10 universities had limited social responsibility projects and visibility on their web sites. It can be said that visibility is higher in public universities compared to foundation universities (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Social Responsibility Projects Visibility on Website

Social Responsibility Projects Visibility on Website			TOTAL
Yes	Public	7	11
	Foundation	4	
No	Public	1	10
	Foundation	9	

Five out of 21 universities do not display social responsibility projects on their websites. Some universities, such as Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University, feature social responsibility projects in their news sections (e.g., “Haberler” on hacibayram.edu.tr), indicating an active effort to communicate social responsibility initiatives to the public. Furthermore, accessibility through search functionalities on websites varies; certain universities provide direct access to social responsibility projects via search tools, while five universities lack this feature, which may hinder users' ability to locate relevant social responsibility information easily. The extent to which social responsibility projects are accessible online directly influences public awareness and engagement, underscoring the importance of user-friendly website design in promoting social responsibility.

**Table 5.** University Social Responsibility Performance Category

Performance Category			TOTAL
HIGH	Public	2	3
	Foundation	1	
MODERATE	Public	5	7
	Foundation	2	
LOW	Public	1	11
	Foundation	10	

When these data are interpreted in a general context, it can be said that there are 3 universities with high social responsibility performance (2 public-1 foundation), 7 universities (5 public, 2 foundation) that show improvement, and 11 universities (1 public-10 foundation) where social responsibility performance can be considered low (Table 5).

### 3) Discussion

Each heading in the analysis allows for an academic evaluation by providing information about the institutional structures, communication channels, and community outreach methods of universities within the framework of social responsibility. First, the analysis of mission and vision statements enables an understanding of whether a university considers social responsibility among its institutional priorities. Mission and vision statements serve as fundamental guides that reflect a university's strategic goals, ethical values, and relationship with society. The inclusion of social responsibility in these statements demonstrates that the university has internalized an awareness of social responsibility and defines contributing to society as one of its core values. This inclusion serves as an important indicator of the support the university provides for social development.

The existence of social responsibility centers allows for the examination of how a university structures its social responsibility activities. The presence of such a center indicates that the university has established a planned infrastructure

to support social projects in terms of resource allocation, organization, and sustainability. These centers enable the institution to effectively carry out its social responsibility activities and facilitate the systematic implementation of initiatives that benefit society.

Focusing on social responsibility projects on the university's website provides insights into whether the institution publicly presents its activities in alignment with the principles of transparency and accountability. Highlighting such projects reflects the value the university attaches to these initiatives and its willingness to share them with society. This focus aids in comprehending the university's communication strategy and aids in assessing the level of public visibility of its social responsibility activities.

Additionally, the university's website makes it easy to evaluate and access these projects, which is significant for participation in and societal access to social responsibility initiatives. Facilitating simple access to these projects enhances the university's capacity to deliver its activities to diverse segments of society. This accessibility guarantees a wide distribution of the impact of social responsibility projects and gauges the extent to which the university engages with society through these initiatives.

Analyzing these aspects allows for an objective evaluation of the university's performance in social responsibility. Additionally, it offers an academic framework for evaluating the societal benefits of the university's social responsibility approach in line with sustainable development goals, as well as assessing the degree of integration of these responsibilities into the institution's corporate culture.

#### 4) Conclusion

In recent years, educational rules have accepted the concept of social responsibility as a primary area of responsibility, with the aim of fostering social development and sustainability. In this context, universities are evolving into institutions that foster development and uphold social and ethical values, fulfilling their societal responsibilities across the entire institution where they produce and share academic knowledge. This examination of the visibility of social responsibility in Ankara's universities assesses how universities integrate social responsibility into their mission and vision, establish social responsibility centers, highlight social responsibility initiatives on their websites, facilitate easy evaluation of these projects, and ensure easy access to these initiatives. This analysis, which assesses the visibility of social responsibility in Ankara universities, strategically focuses on specific topics to gauge the universities' commitment to social responsibility, the significance of this field in their corporate identities, and the contributions they make to society.

The analysis of Ankara's universities reveals diverse approaches to incorporating and promoting social responsibility on official platforms. While some universities demonstrate a clear commitment to social responsibility through mission statements, student societies, and visible projects, others display limited engagement in these areas. Among the 21 universities, none fulfills all the specified criteria. Some of the 21 universities, including Ankara University, Gazi University, and Lokman Hekim, actively promote Social Responsibility projects on their websites. Student societies related to social responsibility generally exist in most universities. The varying presence of social responsibility centers and accessibility of social responsibility information suggests that there is significant room for growth in institutionalizing social responsibility across Turkish universities. For Turkish higher education to foster a comprehensive culture of social responsibility, universities should consider enhancing the visibility and accessibility of social responsibility initiatives, reinforcing their mission as socially responsive institutions. Future strategies might include establishing more social responsibility centers; promoting student societies focused on community engagement; and optimizing the online accessibility of social responsibility projects. These efforts would not only strengthen the societal impact of Turkish universities but also align them with global standards of educational social responsibility.

To enhance their societal impact and align more closely with global standards, Turkish universities can look to examples of institutions that have successfully implemented civic engagement practices worldwide. For instance, Stanford University in the United States integrates civic engagement into its curriculum through programs like the Haas Center for Public Service, which connects students with opportunities to address societal challenges through service-learning and research initiatives. Similarly, the University of Cape Town in South Africa has garnered recognition for its commitment to community-based research and projects that tackle local social issues, such as housing and healthcare, by collaborating with underserved communities. In Europe, Aalborg University in Denmark stands out for its problem-based learning

model, where students work directly with community stakeholders to develop solutions for real-world problems, fostering both academic growth and societal contribution.

These examples illustrate how embedding civic engagement within the institutional framework can amplify the societal role of universities. By establishing dedicated centers for civic engagement, such as those at Stanford or Cape Town, Turkish universities could provide the necessary infrastructure for sustainable, large-scale social responsibility initiatives. Moreover, integrating community-based projects into curricula, as seen at Aalborg, would enable students to directly apply their academic knowledge to societal challenges, creating a reciprocal relationship between universities and the communities they serve. These strategies not only enhance the public value of higher education but also position universities as vital contributors to sustainable development and global civic engagement efforts. Adopting similar practices could significantly elevate the impact and visibility of Turkish universities in fostering societal progress.

In conclusion, to attain a more equitable distribution of social responsibility performance among colleges, institutions must systematically integrate social responsibility into their fundamental ideals and operational structures. Revising mission and vision statements to prioritize societal participation will guarantee that colleges clearly express their dedication to promoting civic well-being. The creation of specialized centers for social responsibility could offer an institutional framework to manage, maintain, and enhance effective programs. These facilities, along with the proactive support of student-led organizations, would establish a vibrant ecology for promoting civic engagement. Moreover, utilizing university websites as clear and accessible forums to display these initiatives will improve public knowledge and engagement. Effective website design, characterized by easy navigation and accessible content, is crucial for showcasing institutional accountability and fostering stakeholder participation.

In addition to these structural changes, universities ought to cultivate partnerships with other academic institutions, commercial sector companies, and non-governmental bodies to optimize resources and skills. Implementing systems for performance evaluation and stakeholder input would allow institutions to enhance their activities, guaranteeing ongoing improvement and alignment with wider social requirements. Incentive structures, such awards for creative initiatives and grant programs, may encourage both students and professors to engage actively in these pursuits. By synchronizing initiatives with global frameworks such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, institutions can enhance their influence while tackling urgent global issues. These tactics raise the visibility and efficacy of university social responsibility while positioning higher education institutions as crucial agents of sustainable development and societal advancement.

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#### **7) Data Availability**

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#### **8) Conflict of interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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## 10) Appendix-1: Social Responsibility Across Universities

University Name	Date of Establishment	Type	Social Responsibility Mentioned in Mission/Vision	Dedicated Social Responsibility Center	Social Responsibility Student Societies	Social Responsibility Projects Visible on Website	Performance Category
Ankara Bilim University	2020	Foundation	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate
Ankara Medipol University	2018	Foundation	No	No	No	No	Low
Ankara Music and Fine Arts University	2017	Public	No	No	No	No	Low
Ankara University	1946	Public	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Atılım University	1996	Foundation	No	No	No	No	Low
Başkent University	1994	Foundation	No	No	Yes	No	Low
Bilkent University	1984	Foundation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Çankaya University	1997	Foundation	No	No	No	No	Low
Gazi University	1926	Public	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate
Hacettepe University	1967	Public	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	High
Hacı Bayram Veli University	2018	Public	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate
Lokman Hekim University	2018	Foundation	No	No	No	No	Low
METU	1956	Public	No	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate
Ostim University	2017	Foundation	No	No	No	Yes	Low
Social Sciences University	2013	Public	Yes	No	No	Yes	Moderate
TED University	2009	Foundation	No	No	Yes	No	Low
TOBB University	2003	Foundation	No	No	Yes	No	Low
Türk Hava Kurumu University	2011	Foundation	No	No	No	No	Low
Ufuk University	1999	Foundation	No	No	No	No	Low
Yıldırım Beyazıt University	2010	Public	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate
Yüksek İhtisas University	2011	Foundation	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Moderate