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## University social responsibility as a key factor in the professional training of students in a municipal center

La responsabilidad social universitaria como factor clave en la formación profesional de los estudiantes en un centro municipal

A responsabilidade social universitária como fator-chave na formação profissional dos alunos de um centro municipal

### Abstract

**Introduction:** University Social Responsibility is of great importance in the academic field, as it involves the meaningful participation of universities in sustainable social development. **Objective:** to demonstrate the impact of University Social Responsibility on the professional training of students in a municipal center. **Method:** the research was conducted under a mixed methodological approach. Theoretical and empirical methods were employed, allowing for a characterization of the fundamental aspects of the subject under study. **Results:** the main findings indicate that University Social Responsibility actions have an impact on students' professional training, since both students, professors, and administrative staff perceive it as such, and also because the various activities encompass a series of important aspects that gain greater relevance in the Municipal University Center under study. Furthermore, the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of these actions in the preparation of future professionals were identified. **Conclusion:** University Social Responsibility is a key factor in professional training because it provides students with opportunities to apply their knowledge in real contexts and promotes values, skills, and competencies necessary to face the challenges of contemporary society.

**Keywords:** higher education, professional training, university social responsibility, sustainability

### Resumen

**Introducción:** la Responsabilidad Social Universitaria es de suma importancia en el ámbito académico, pues implica la participación significativa de las universidades en el desarrollo social sostenible.

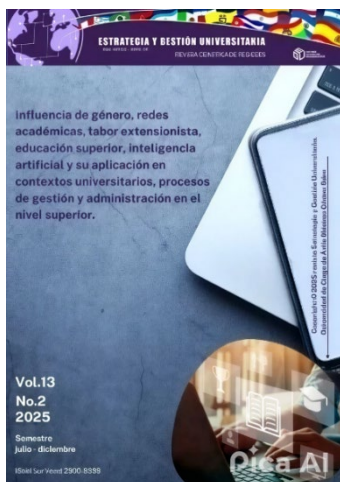
**Objetivo:** demostrar el impacto de la Responsabilidad Social Universitaria en la formación profesional de los estudiantes en un centro municipal. **Método:** la investigación se realizó bajo un enfoque metodológico mixto. Se emplearon métodos teóricos y empíricos que permitieron obtener una caracterización de los aspectos fundamentales del tema abordado. **Resultados:** los principales hallazgos refieren que las acciones de Responsabilidad Social Universitaria impactan en la formación profesional de los estudiantes, dado que, tanto ellos como los profesores y personal administrativo así lo perciben, y también porque en las variadas actividades se abarcan una serie de aspectos importantes que adquieren mayor relevancia en el Centro Universitario Municipal de estudio. Además, se identificaron las fortalezas y debilidades de la implementación de sus acciones en la preparación de los futuros profesionales. **Conclusión:** la Responsabilidad Social Universitaria es un factor clave en la formación profesional porque proporciona a los estudiantes oportunidades para aplicar sus conocimientos en contextos reales y promueve valores, habilidades y competencias necesarias para enfrentar los desafíos de la sociedad actual.

**Palabras clave:** educación superior, formación profesional, responsabilidad social universitaria, sostenibilidad

### Resumo

**Introdução:** a Responsabilidade Social Universitária é de grande importância no âmbito acadêmico, pois implica a participação significativa das universidades no desenvolvimento social sustentável. **Objetivo:** demonstrar o impacto da Responsabilidade Social Universitária na formação profissional dos estudantes em um centro municipal. **Método:** a pesquisa foi realizada sob uma abordagem metodológica mista. Foram empregados métodos teóricos e empíricos que permitiram obter uma caracterização dos aspectos fundamentais do tema abordado. **Resultados:** os principais achados indicam que as ações de Responsabilidade Social Universitária impactam a formação profissional dos estudantes, uma vez que tanto eles quanto os professores e o corpo administrativo assim o percebem, e também porque as diversas atividades abrangem uma série de aspectos relevantes que adquirem maior importância no Centro Universitário Municipal em estudo. Além disso, foram identificadas as fortalezas e fragilidades da implementação dessas ações na preparação dos futuros profissionais. **Conclusão:** A Responsabilidade Social Universitária é um fator-chave na formação profissional, pois proporciona aos estudantes oportunidades de aplicar seus conhecimentos em contextos reais e promove valores, habilidades e competências necessárias para enfrentar os desafios da sociedade contemporânea.

**Palavras-chave:** ensino superior, formação profissional, responsabilidade social universitária, sustentabilidade



## Introduction

University Social Responsibility (USR) has become an important topic in the academic sphere in recent years, as it involves the active participation of universities in the sustainable development of society (George et al., 2024). Pactwa et al. (2024) have conducted studies on the state of USR in Polish and European universities. Meanwhile, García and Restrepo (2019), Vallaey and Álvarez (2019), Sarmiento et al. (2021), Severino et al. (2023), and Vásquez (2023) have reflectively analyzed the status of USR in Latin America and recommend strategies for its development and implementation. According to François Vallaey, president of the Latin American University Social Responsibility Union (URSULA), the goal of USR is to “embed USR in Higher Education Institutions so that the community, society, and the environment can notice it” (2021, p.10). In this regard, USR is not limited to community volunteer activities; rather, it seeks to integrate and instill ethical and moral values in responsible citizens from the professional training of undergraduate students.

The importance of USR in professional training lies in its enhancement of the acquisition and development of transversal skills and competencies among students, such as analytical ability, teamwork, effective communication, problem-solving, and leadership. It also encourages the application of their knowledge to address social issues and confront the economic, social, and environmental challenges of contemporary society. Thus, it aligns with the views of Morante Ríos (2023) and Carrillo-Durán et al. (2024), who assert that universities are training centers that play a fundamental role in promoting sustainable social development. “When USR is integrated into the curriculum, a dual impact is achieved: improved professional training and greater social contribution” (Fernández Guerrero & Morales Salazar, 2025, p. e232).

In the Cuban context, USR is particularly relevant. Studies by Rodríguez (2024a; 2024b; 2024c) on curricular flexibility, institutional alignment with national policies, and the role of Municipal University Centers (CUM) in local development provide background related to USR and professional training. Rodríguez (2024c) suggests that, in the process of continuous improvement in Higher Education in Cuba, the flexibility of study programs allows each educational institution to structure its educational project in response to the social needs of its territory. This means that the teaching faculty must develop creative and innovative proposals that enrich the curricular design and enable optimal professional training for students.

Particularly, CUM play a significant role in the development of the local community where they are situated. Consequently, USR takes on greater importance in Cuba, as these educational institutions have a fundamental role in community development due to their close relationship with the local environment. Therefore, it is essential to address the impact of USR on the professional training of students in such university centers, with the aim of identifying strengths and weaknesses in its implementation and proposing strategies to enhance its effectiveness.

The CUM relevant to this study is tasked with ensuring the comprehensive training of undergraduate and graduate students, the advancement and preparation of personnel and reserves, and stimulating the development of technology, science, innovation, and local development. It promotes the ethics and social responsibility of the university, which generates a positive impact on the local community and

strengthens the social commitment of the educational institution. The relevance of this topic lies in utilizing University Social Responsibility to promote professional training among undergraduate students at a CUM.

According to Rodríguez (2024b), a strategic educational project is implemented at the University Center at the institutional level, acting as a catalyst for change in the Cuban economy and society, with a firm commitment to building an independent, democratic, socialist, sovereign, prosperous, and sustainable nation, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals established in the 2030 Agenda.

This article addresses USR as a key factor in professional training within a Municipal University Center. It seeks to understand how the USR actions implemented in this institution contribute to the development of fundamental skills and competencies in future professionals. Thus, the objective is to demonstrate the impact of University Social Responsibility on the professional training of students in a municipal center. Additionally, it aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of USR actions in the preparation of future professionals. To achieve this objective, comprehensive research was conducted, including a literature review on USR, analysis of institutional documents, and interviews with students, professors, and administrative staff of a CUM to gather significant data regarding the perception of the university community concerning Social Responsibility and its impact on professional training.

University Social Responsibility is a management policy that began in Latin America in the 2000s, initiated by the Chilean university network Universidad Construye País. Vallaeys and Álvarez (2019) assert that a new philosophy regarding the social impact of universities has developed, adopting an ethical and critical approach toward the epistemologies and knowledge imparted. They advocate the existence of four essential processes: Training, Management, Social Participation, and Research. This philosophy aims to generate significant changes in university management to avoid remaining mere words and good intentions.

Rodríguez (2024a) states that the emergence of references related to USR as a management policy at the end of the 20th century demands the development of actions that respond to the needs, requests, and social demands placed on higher education institutions (HEIs). According to Bosmenier Cruz et al. (2020), the goal of governance is to achieve greater closeness between the university, business, government, and society. That is, to extend the participation of university community members to the surrounding community and engage them in institutional activities, promoting inclusion and civic education in efforts aimed at local development, thereby contributing collectively to the sustainability of community environments.

In 2009, Vallaeys et al. created the "Manual of First Steps in University Social Responsibility," which is considered the first tool aimed at managing USR in Latin America (URSULA, 2018). It proposed a series of strategies for its implementation and internal evaluation tools for all stakeholders within the university. Eslava-Zapata et al. (2024) argue that adopting an innovative approach entails a profound and complex transformation in university management that must coherently integrate

actions in innovation, establish strong support networks, and formulate dynamic educational policies that support and promote this new institutional mindset.

USR has a significant advantage: it is a process that encompasses comprehensive and transversal management, directly involving HEIs. It addresses ethical and moral demands that seek to resolve institutional barriers that hinder higher education from generating socially relevant knowledge to confront our development challenges.

The humanistic approach to Higher Education reaffirms the notion that it should be directed toward the comprehensive training of individuals, professionals, and citizens capable of ethically, environmentally, and socially responsibly facing the various challenges of endogenous development and the integration of nations, by participating critically, actively, and constructively in society (UNESCO, 2018).

In 2020, UNESCO proposed that universities be more socially committed educational centers and environmentally responsible, highlighting the current world's need to train future professionals who are responsible and engaged with sustainable development. González and González (2020), Alcántara et al. (2022), Vallaey's et al. (2022), and Maynard et al. (2023) indicate that the 2030 Agenda requires universities to reconsider their role, dedicating resources to foster actions that promote participation from all and contribute, through their substantive processes, to achieving the proposed objectives. Therefore, it is crucial to focus the educational efforts of all involved in the training process on instilling University Social Responsibility in future professionals. In 2018, the Latin American University Social Responsibility Union (URSULA) was established to deepen and intensify the HACER framework, which stands for: Honoring our word, Auto-diagnosing our organization, Changing our processes, Escalating our achievements, and Reviewing our performance (URSULA, 2019).

The 2030 Agenda, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), serves as a useful guide for directing practices and management policies to enhance curricular designs and study plans in Higher Education. Andia Valencia et al. (2022) emphasize that by involving the university community in the planning and execution of USR-based actions, HEIs promote shared responsibility and a sense of belonging. A participatory approach fosters the management of educational, organizational, and social impacts, strengthens the community spirit, and fosters unity within the university.

During the Regional Conference on Higher Education (CRES) held in 2018, it was clearly identified that USR aspires to transform the traditional discourse of linkage, extension, and social outreach (CRES, 2018). Saborido (2018) states that the 2030 Agenda represents a priority for Cuba, linked to the National Economic and Social Development Plan (PNDES). Its transformative vision demands the active participation of all. Therefore, Cuban universities must play a fundamental role in training the human resources that society needs to achieve this goal.

University Social Responsibility is the comprehensive and transversal management of each social and environmental impact of Higher Education Institutions and all processes aimed at achieving the SDGs. From these impacts, four pillars of USR emerge:

1. **Responsible campus:** refers to institutional governance encompassing all endogenous procedures from human resource management to the work environment, including the environmentally responsible preservation of resources.
2. **Professional and civic training:** addresses the responsible management of academic programs that must develop competencies of responsibility in graduates.
3. **Social knowledge management:** related to ethical and responsible administration in the production and dissemination of knowledge, in research, and the epistemological models implemented in the educational sphere.
4. **Social participation:** encompasses the management of university participation in the community in a socially responsible manner.

According to Małgorzata et al. (2020), a fundamental aspect is university infrastructure. It is precisely here that these four pillars continuously feed into each other to foster dynamic and ongoing improvement in social responsibility and, consequently, in the university, based on the relevance of its organizational and academic processes.

García et al. (2021) assert that professionals will enter the labor market equipped to promote a responsible and ethical perspective that favors the common good and social justice. This requires “the redefinition of the pedagogical and didactic knowledge of contemporary educators to ensure the quality of an education corresponding to the competencies and human values demanded by graduation models and their relevance” (Chacón et al., 2025, p.24). Thus, the time has come for universities to reevaluate and transform their approach to Social Responsibility.

It is recognized that incorporating USR into professional training enhances the link between the academic realm and the labor market. This is because students have the opportunity to collaborate with local businesses and organizations, establishing strategic alliances that benefit both students and the community. Molina et al. (2025) affirm that when HEIs focus on improving educational quality through educational programs, the goal is to guide student decisions, strengthen ties with the labor market, evaluate educational impact, and incorporate university social responsibility into the curriculum.

USR implies that future professionals are aware of their social impact and assume responsibility for contributing to the common good. USR generates a positive impact on the local community, as research can identify problems and direct concrete actions that can be implemented to benefit the local population. Its effective performance fosters partnerships with local businesses and organizations, facilitates research projects, and promotes student participation in actions addressing specific social issues. Furthermore, it strengthens the social commitment of the educational institution.

Applying USR in a University Center requires reflecting on the role that the institution plays in society and how it can contribute significantly, thereby strengthening the social commitment of the institution and its capacity to train professionals committed to their environment. Additionally, it generates a positive impact that contributes to sustainable local development and improves the quality

of life for individuals. Pérez-Rivera et al. (2020) express that developing a particularized, solid university identity focused on the sense of belonging within the university community (students, faculty, and administrative staff) can foster commitment and stimulate participation in actions that strengthen the institution. USR promotes student participation as part of professional training by encouraging actions and projects in which students can actively engage.

At the CUM, undergraduate students participate in research addressing social issues and propose solutions; in this way, they apply their knowledge and investigative skills for the benefit of the local community. The undergraduate professional training is based on scientific foundations and the priorities of Higher Education, stemming from the guidelines received and transformations related to the policies approved by the Ministry of Higher Education. The development of professional training supports comprehensive territorial student training, aligned with the guiding ideas of Cuban Higher Education. It unifies education and instruction, aiming to promote ethical, moral, ideological, and political values to cultivate a humanistic, educated, and revolutionary student body—competent and independent future professionals capable of succeeding across all sectors of society..

## Methods and materials

The research was conducted using a mixed-methods approach to delve into social and educational phenomena from the perspective and experience of the participants. The mixed approach “allows for better ‘exploration and exploitation’ of the data” (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2010, p. 636).

### Theoretical methods:

- **Historical-logical method:** this method enabled the reconstruction of the evolution of USR to establish causal and logical relationships between its emergence, its institutionalization in Latin America, and its incorporation into Cuban educational policies and practices. The method facilitated the review of conceptual frameworks, manuals, and models such as the URSULA Manual and national guiding documents, situating USR in its historical development and justifying its relevance in professional training.
- **Analytical-synthetic method:** this method was employed to analyze the information obtained, identifying significant patterns and relationships, and synthesizing the findings into coherent conclusions regarding the impact of USR on the professional training of undergraduate students.
- **Inductive-deductive method:** this method facilitated the formulation of hypotheses and theories based on the empirical data collected, ranging from specific observations of unique cases to generalizations about the university community as a whole.

### Empirical methods:

- **Document analysis:** an extensive bibliographic review was conducted of 53 scientific articles on USR, selected based on the following criteria: published

between 2015 and 2024, focus on USR in Latin America, and relevance to professional training. The search strategy was documented, and the terms used included “University Social Responsibility” and “professional training” across databases such as Scopus, SciELO, REDALYC, and DoAJ. Additionally, 26 institutional documents were analyzed, including the guiding documents of the nine programs offered at the CUM under study, the strategic planning of the University of Matanzas and the Municipal University Center of Cárdenas, the teaching process plan, the professional model, and the programs of the main integrative disciplines corresponding to Curriculum Plan “E” and the Educational Strategy. The objective of this document review was to understand the background, approaches, and previous studies related to University Social Responsibility and the comprehensive training of students in Higher Education, as well as to gather crucial information that supports the understanding of the importance of USR in professional training within the context of universalization in Cuba.

- **Interviews:** these were used to collect specific and comparable data from different individuals, in this case among students, professors, and administrative staff. When designing the interview, differentiated questions were formulated according to the role of participants, allowing for exploration of unique perspectives on the topic of study. Each interview consisted of 10 closed items and 4 open-ended questions, for example: 1) What USR actions are you aware of that have been carried out at the CUM? 2) How have these actions influenced your professional skills? 3) Describe a specific experience that changed your professional behavior. The interviews were semi-structured in the open-ended questions to delve deeper into perceptions. This facilitated the analysis and comparison of responses, enabling the reliability of the findings of this research. All interviews were recorded with the informed written consent of the participants. The study received approval from the Board of Directors of the CUM under study, and anonymity and confidentiality in data handling were ensured. These interviews were conducted individually in an educational context, aiming to understand the dynamics of learning and institutional management.
- **Statistical-mathematical methods:** descriptive statistics were used, allowing for the analysis of results. Percentage calculations enabled a quantitative study of the data provided by the applied instruments. The analysis was conducted using SPSS v.27.

The triangulation of data as a method in the research combined document analysis (53 scientific articles and 26 institutional documents), structured interviews with students, professors, and administrative staff (30 interviews), and the review of institutional records and projects of the CUM. This mixed approach allowed for the contrasting and validation of quantitative and qualitative evidence regarding the impact of USR on professional training. Triangulation strengthened the internal validity of the study by confronting perceptions gathered in interviews with documentary data and evidence of concrete actions, such as participation in initiatives during COVID-19 and extension projects, enabling more robust inferences about how USR contributes to skills, competencies, values, and professional



practices.

The population consisted of 310 students, 15 professors, and 5 administrative staff for a total of 330 individuals, all members of the university community of the CUM under study. The selected sample comprised 30 individuals: 23 students, 5 professors, and 2 administrative staff. The choice of a relatively small sample is justified by practical considerations such as time and resource limitations. Probability sampling was employed:

**Simple random sampling:** this ensured that all defined subsets of the target population had the same probability of selection and, therefore, inclusion in the sample. This approach is consistent with the aim of reflecting diverse programs, academic levels, different areas of knowledge, and professional experience.

## Results and discussion

At the CUM of Cárdenas, the primary priority is educational activity in the teaching-learning process of undergraduate professional training. This process is carried out with a comprehensive approach that involves the entire university community through participation.

The professional training of undergraduates is developed based on a solid curricular proposal, which includes both the educational teaching process and the various curricular strategies for each program offered at the CUM. Extracurricular activities, integrated through university extension and scientific research, are crucial elements for the comprehensive training of undergraduates, ensuring mastery of the professional spheres and modes of action. According to the evolution of the curricula, this approach responds to the characteristics of each generation, influenced by scientific-technical, socioeconomic, and sociocultural changes at both national and international levels, as well as by the demands and needs of the local environment (CUM, 2022, p. 19).

At the CUM, professional training is conducted in a semi-presential and distance modality, through encounter courses (CPE) and distance courses (CaD). There are nine programs: Agronomy, Law, Accounting and Finance, Physical Culture, Sociocultural Management for Development, Industrial Engineering, Bachelor's in Preschool Education, Bachelor's in Primary Education, and Bachelor's in Tourism. Additionally, the admission process to HEIs is supported by vocational and professional training actions directed at pre-university students in local entities and municipal popular councils.

The CUM has assumed an active role concerning impactful tasks for the university and society. One fundamental aspect to highlight is that students express satisfaction with the training received, recognize the role of the faculty, and acknowledge the relevance and quality of the educational process in becoming competent professionals. Students enrolled in encounter courses and certain distance modality programs engage in practical work based on the issues outlined in the institutional problem bank or those identified in the Local Development Strategy.

As a result of the interviews conducted with students, professors, and

administrative staff, strengths and weaknesses in professional training at the CUM were identified.

### Strengths:

- Semi-presential and distance education allows more individuals to access higher education, especially those residing in remote or rural areas away from educational centers.
- Students can adjust their study schedules according to their needs and responsibilities, facilitating the balance with other activities such as work or family care.
- Distance education enables the use of technological tools, such as online platforms and multimedia resources, which enrich the educational process and encourage proactive participation from students.
- With greater freedom to organize their time and not being tied to a fixed schedule, students develop skills of autonomy and self-discipline, which are valuable for their personal and professional development.

### Weaknesses:

- Although internet access has improved in Cuba in recent years, inequalities in access to technology and connectivity still exist, limiting some students' participation in semi-presential and distance education.
- While flexible schedules are an advantage, they also require students to be responsible and disciplined to meet tasks and deadlines.
- Some disciplines necessitate in-person practice or laboratory experimentation, which can be challenging to conduct in a distance education environment.

Each identified strength and weakness explicitly relates to indicators of professional training: (a) 'Expanded access through semi-presential education' → increased coverage and future local employability; (b) 'Applied research' → knowledge transfer and improvements in productive processes; (c) 'Financial limitations' → restrictions on scaling initiatives that would develop soft skills and technical competencies.

Therefore, it is essential to consider these strengths and weaknesses when designing semi-presential and distance education strategies in relation to USR at the CUM. Solutions must be sought to overcome limitations and maximize the benefits of this type of education, ensuring equity and educational quality for all students. Thus, the principles expressed in the "HACER" Model of URSULA are fulfilled.

Some experiences of student participation in social responsibility actions within the context of universalization in Cárdenas include: CUM students have engaged in community service and volunteer activities when the situation warranted, providing support to vulnerable groups and communities. This contributes to social welfare. A notable example of this integration was the response during the most critical phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Impact actions related to COVID-19*

Stages	Participants	Related actions	Percentage
First stage	325	Stay in Red Zone at the University of Matanzas	6,5% (21)
		Statistical processing	6,1% (20)
		Food production	39,4% (128)
		Other COVID-19 related tasks	48% (156)
Second stage	123	Positioned in medical offices and polyclinics for support in surveys	33,3% (41)
		Statistical processing of the vaccination process	27,6% (34)
		In urban agriculture	17,1% (21)
		In construction entities	3,3% (4)
		Supporting the organization of the CUM	2,4% (3)
Tasks as youth work brigades related to pharmacy support, assessing conditions in vulnerable areas, and providing essential goods to elderly individuals	16,3% (20)		

Source: Author's own elaboration.

**Note.** This table shows how the 310 students and 15 participating professors were distributed across different impact actions related to COVID-19, assigned to the CUM of Cárdenas by the University of Matanzas (CUM, 2022, pp. 21-22).

While Vallaey and Álvarez (2019) propose four essential processes for USR, data from the CUM under study show a strong emphasis on social participation and professional training, reflected in student involvement in projects and volunteer actions. As observed in Table 1, 39.4% participated in food production and 48% in "other tasks," which supports the idea of USR as a community action. However, there are limitations in institutional governance and knowledge management due to a lack of resources.

The support for these critical tasks during such difficult times fostered collective recognition from the local community, the province, and the nation towards the students and faculty, due to the gratitude and social satisfaction derived from fulfilling such a humane and supportive role. As UNESCO (2018) states, the humanistic approach to Higher Education must always be present, and this has been increasingly evident in recent years. Since then, students have developed other social initiatives and created social projects. Examples include:

- GestionarC from the program in Sociocultural Management for Development, which addresses specific issues such as education, proposing strategies to optimize quality and equity in education; environmental concerns, where they research environmental problems in Cuba and propose measures to promote environmental sustainability in the country; health, aimed at

supporting disease prevention campaigns to improve the health status of the population; and social inclusion, investigating issues of social exclusion in the municipality, such as discrimination, gender violence, drug addiction, and marginalization, among others.

- Tourism Management for Local Development from the Bachelor's in Tourism program deals with topics related to heritage wealth, communities, natural, historical, social, cultural potentials, and human capital in the city, exploring the possibility of implementing new tourist routes that contribute to local development.

All these research topics addressed in both projects allow undergraduate students to delve into relevant social issues in the locality, the province, and Cuba, develop social entrepreneurship skills, and work in teams to generate a positive impact, while also fostering social responsibility. Moreover, the aim is to propose concrete solutions that assist in the well-being of Cuban society and sustainable development, while encouraging meaningful participation from the university community, including students, faculty, and staff, in various events and conferences related to social, economic, or environmental themes, where they can learn from experts and share experiences with other students and professionals.

They have collaborated with the institutional program of the University Chair for the Elderly (CUAM), directed at older adults, aiding in the management and promotion of activities and their development.

Among the educational, organizational, and social impacts in Cárdenas is the fact that the CUM has a postgraduate training program, known for its prestige and the quality of its faculty among graduates and their employers. The impact that these tools have on professional advancement and training is significant, as they reflect the knowledge and actions of certified specialists aimed at addressing problems in business and community production. This corroborates the assertions by Andia Valencia et al. (2022), as it demonstrates how the relationship between the intra-university community and the external community positively impacts the territory. It is asserted that both undergraduate and postgraduate training have been fundamental in the education and performance of local workers.

The presence of experienced professors, with solid academic preparation and a good and constant disposition, enhances the prestige of the Cárdenas institution. The faculty, with their knowledge, human qualities, and competent skills, enables the resolution of problems concerning professional training to respond to the productive concerns of their entities, whether private, state, or mixed. The territory acknowledges with satisfaction the professional qualities and the appropriate ideological, patriotic, and political preparation of all graduates from the CUM, whether from undergraduate or postgraduate programs.

## Table 2

*Key differences between typical university activities vs. University Social Responsibility (USR) activities*

Aspect	University activities	USR activities
Purpose	To academically and technically train students. To produce and disseminate knowledge. To evaluate and certify learning.	To orient these functions toward social and environmental impact. To respond to territorial needs and the SDGs. To incorporate ethical management, community participation, and commitment to local development.
Scope and Focus	Centered on internal substantive processes (teaching, research, academic extension) and on pedagogical quality and professionalization.	Transversally integrates these processes to generate concrete community benefits, incorporating management, training, research, and social participation as substantial axes of the training process.
Relationship with Community	Includes extension and practices that do not always prioritize measurable social impact.	Emphasizes active and permanent engagement with the local environment, student participation in community problems and projects, as well as partnerships with territorial entities to address real situations.
Impact Evaluation	Internal academic and institutional performance evaluation.	Self-diagnosis, process change, and evaluation of social/environmental impact (URSULA's "HACER" model) and contribution to the 2030 sustainable development agenda and the SDGs.
Expected Outcomes in Training	Technical and disciplinary competencies, curricular mastery.	Development of ethical values, social responsibility, leadership, teamwork, and competencies applied in real contexts.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

**Note.** Analyzing this table clarifies that in the community practices of the CUM under study, during COVID-19, projects like GestionarC and Tourism Management, and support for the CUAM institutional program, where knowledge is applied to solve local problems, demonstrate USR activities by generating concrete social impact.

Based on the interviews and the analysis conducted, there was indeed an impact of USR on the professional training of students at the CUM under study.

- Students perceive a positive impact, as they believe that USR actions provided them with an understanding of social reality, practical complementarity to theory, relevant experiences, and the development of skills such as teamwork, communication, leadership, and problem-solving. "Participating in the COVID-19 brigade allowed me to lead teams and improve my communication with the community" (Student 12).

- Professors perceive a positive impact because they recognize that USR strengthens professional training, supports applied research, and enhances curricular relevance; it also contributes to institutional prestige and ties with the local territory. “The Tourism Management project provided us with real experience to propose routes that local entities now use” (Professor 3).

- Administrative staff perceive a partial/positive impact, highlighting organizational contributions to postgraduate programs, but they also note limitations due to resources and experience to expand USR actions. “Actions are taken to actively connect the university with the local community, but more could be done if we had more resources” (Administrative Staff 2).

In summary, all groups largely agree that USR has produced educational, social, and organizational impacts, although they acknowledge resource limitations and the need for greater curricular formalization. The quotes provide direct evidence of changes attributable to USR actions at the CUM.

The implementation of USR at CUM Cárdenas as a key factor for students' professional training demonstrates the educational institution's commitment to promoting ethical and moral values and a social consciousness among each member of the university community. This aligns with Eslava-Zapata et al. (2024), who express the need for an innovative approach that implies a complex and profound transformation in university management. Given the above, we proceed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of implementing USR actions in the training of future professionals at the CUM, which are:

### Strengths:

- It is an educational center that responds to the local social demands identified in previous research conducted by students, professors, and institutional specialists.
- It enjoys local, provincial, and national recognition due to the quality of its faculty and professional training.
- Each year, vocational and professional orientation activities are conducted to provide opportunities for individuals who would otherwise not have access to university due to personal, geographical, economic, or social reasons.
- It promotes meaningful and responsible participation of program coordinators and faculty in the design and defense of curricula for their adaptation and modification.
- It has a good institutional image in municipal communities.
- There is greater integration with the local community, as the center has established close ties with the population, institutions, organizations, and businesses in the area.
- There is a positive impact derived from applied research activities that improve substantive processes carried out in local entities.
- There is an enhanced personal and cultural formation of the university

community through involvement in extension projects.

### Weaknesses:

- Limited budget and financial resources, which hinder the implementation of large-scale USR projects or access to updated educational and technological resources.
- Little experience for more effective implementation of USR actions and evaluating their impact on professional training.
- Limitations in academic diversity compared to central university branches regarding the possibility of exploring various fields of study related to USR.

These strengths and weaknesses of implementing USR actions provide qualitative evidence supporting the central claim of the study, which is to demonstrate the impact of USR on professional training by showing perceptions, experiences, and observed effects at the CUM. The strengths and weaknesses combine results derived from documentary research, interviews, and discussions of perceptions.

The following points summarize key perceptions of the interviewed students regarding the impact of USR actions at the CUM and how these contribute to their professional training:

- They believe that USR actions provide a deeper understanding of social reality, helping them develop empathy towards different communities and contexts.
- They perceive that these practical experiences complement their theoretical training, allowing them to apply knowledge in real situations.
- They mention that participating in USR actions has allowed them to gain relevant experiences in their field of study.
- They emphasize that the actions promote the development of skills such as teamwork, communication, leadership, and problem-solving, along with competencies acquired, formed, and developed through social interaction throughout life, responding to a specific context.

Additionally, some students expressed a desire for these and other initiatives to be formally integrated into the curriculum. Overall, most agree that USR actions are an enriching component of their training, as they contribute to shaping them into more conscious and committed professionals and citizens in their environment.

Several key points from the perceptions of professors and administrative staff interviewed about the impact of USR actions at the CUM and how these contribute to professional training include:

- They value that USR strengthens students' ethical and civic training, promoting social values and commitment.
- They consider that USR facilitates the practical application of knowledge and the linkage between theory and practice through community problems, projects, and research.

- They perceive that participation in USR actions develops transversal skills and competencies: teamwork, communication, leadership, and problem-solving.
- They observe that USR enhances the relevance of training concerning local needs and favors graduates' employability.
- They note limitations in enhancing impact due to insufficient financial resources, lack of implementation experience, and evaluation of USR.
- They emphasize the need to formally integrate USR activities into the curriculum to ensure continuity and academic recognition.
- They appreciate the social recognition and institutional prestige generated by USR actions, as evidenced by community responses to events such as COVID-19.
- They believe that USR contributes to forming a university identity and sense of belonging among students and the faculty and administrative staff.

In summary, some important findings are: a) Students: 78% report improvement in soft skills after participating in USR actions; b) Professors: 67% state that USR has enriched curricular design and the relevance of practices; c) Administrative staff: 50% perceive greater institutional recognition in the community.

USR can be integrated into the curriculum and goes beyond academic aspects. This can be achieved through talks, seminars, workshops, and other training activities that promote reflection and commitment to social responsibility. Encouraging student participation in USR actions and projects is fundamental, as it may include internships in organizations or companies committed to social responsibility and involvement in research or volunteer projects.

## Conclusions

This research demonstrates the impact of University Social Responsibility. It positively affects the professional training of students at the CUM under study by providing practical experiences that strengthen transversal skills and competencies such as teamwork, communication, leadership, and problem-solving. It enhances social sensitivity, the application of knowledge in real contexts, and participation in community actions, as evidenced by the perceptions of students, professors, and administrative staff. However, this impact is conditioned by institutional weaknesses such as a lack of financial resources, limited experience in evaluating USR, and insufficient curricular integration, suggesting that the effect is significant but partial and dependent on improvements in the management, evaluation, and formalization of USR within the institution.

University Social Responsibility is a key factor in professional training because it provides students with opportunities to apply their knowledge in real situations and promotes the values, skills, and competencies necessary to face the



challenges of today's society.

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