CAGS Brown Bag session: the role of social and environmental reporting in Higher Education: a multiple case study from Italy

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the reasons that have driven the development of social and environmental reporting (SER) in the higher education system. After a first analysis carried out on development of the SER in Italian Universities starting from the first report produced, we investigated the motivations that have driven or have hampered the development of SER in a selected sample of Italian universities. To reach this research goal, sixteen interviews and one focus group (composed of people in key roles such as the rector of the selected universities) were conducted, using a multiple case studies methodology and an interpretative approach for the data analysis. The selected cases studies were chosen because they present a polarised perspective: four universities that implement SER and four which do not. The research underlines the differences in function and development of the tool due to the influence of several factors, such as the university vocation, the governance commitment and the engagement of internal and external stakeholders. The findings give an overview of the motivations that drive this process and the main barriers that hamper this path in the Italian context. This paper also underlines the different meanings attributed to social and environmental reporting in higher education, starting from its communication role up to its planning and control function. In addition, this study contributes to filling the literature gap about the motivations that drive SER in the higher education system, and also may support universities that have already implemented this process or those that decide to undertake it in the future.

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