

# GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

An image cannot be built without a reference. “If you enjoy a good reputation, endeavor to be what you appear to be”, said the Greek philosopher Socrates. This path connecting appearance and being is one this volume has tried to walk.

Over the course of its pages, international academics from universities and industry experts have reflected on the origin, characteristics and, above all, the scope –institutional, economic, and social– of the reputation of universities.

As the articles illustrate, from complementary visions and lively debates with each other, higher education has landed –sometimes somewhat roughly– in the field of “objective” indicators measuring reputation. That is, in rankings.

In such a competitive environment, reputation, as defined by Jan Sadlak in the preface, is an “intangible asset with tangible results”. So, every university takes increasing care of the structures of reputation in the professional, economic, social and even personal environments that govern its institutional life.

Each university is a brand that must be nurtured and preserved. Thus, from its work dedicated to the social good and the creativity its faculty brings to teaching, the university converts the Socratic maxim into reality. A tangible, concrete reality.

This is the volume which the reader holds now; a book divided in six chapters that have examined the reputation of universities, beginning from general principles and leading to concrete proposals. Over the course of its pages, we have sought to find the link between the concept of reputation and the specific nature of higher education, strengthening its connection to the notion of excellence and identifying the protagonists of the “intangible assets” of which we have spoken. We have made proposals for its management, discussed who is responsible for its

development, and we have examined what the decisive factors are for keeping it fertile and productive.

Everything set forth herein, open to the richness of academic debate, allows us to enter into a discussion on university reputation with depth and subtlety, promising ideas, and new perspectives. However, following the tradition of university research, it is relevant to condense the most important ideas of this *Universities' Reputation* into the following points:

1. Universities operate on a global stage, without borders, where reputation has become very important for attracting teachers, researchers, students and social support.
2. The reputation of the university is synonymous with “perceived quality”, reflected in a public opinion with respect to the “objective quality”. The roots of good reputation are in the quality of teaching, research and transfer of knowledge to society.
3. To keep the focus of its essential mission, the management of its reputation, as in all the activity of the university, has to be at the center education and student experience.
4. University rankings fulfill a social role in informing students of their choices; they are also a tool for university governance and a factor of transparency for the whole of society in the field of higher education. At the same time, however, rankings have intrinsic limitations, which make prudent use of them as an element of quality management and knowledge of perceptions, essential.
5. To aspire to having an excellent reputation, each university must outline the distinctive features of its identity and define its project. When identity and brand are clear, goals and indicators for governance and management can be set.
6. A perspective of reputation includes intangible and tangible elements in university governance: quality, relationships, transparency, work environment, student experience, and knowledge of perceptions.
7. Among the intangibles that make up a reputation and must be managed, the university’s social responsibility stands out in a particular way. Responding to the needs and expectations of the environment is part of the mission of each university.

8. Cultivating a reputation requires a strategic approach to communication, which is understood not simply as broadcasting information, but as a communication process; in order to improve reputation it is necessary to improve reality.
9. On a borderless global stage, the reputation of each individual university cannot be separated from the reputation of the university as an institution. Therefore, improving reputation involves a collaborative approach between universities.
10. This cooperative approach also involves public authorities, who must establish policies, provide resources and do everything possible to create strong systems that enable universities to provide the service that society expects and deserves.

This synthesis of the main ideas highlights the need for further progress in the research on the reputation of universities, and motivation to keep the debate initiated in Pamplona alive. *Building Universities' Reputation 2015* is just the tip of the iceberg; now the foundations must be deepened. We aim with this volume to encourage further research and dialogue by collecting the reflections offered there, which are so central to the issue of the future of higher education.