

Education in Multiculturality Education to Interculturality

In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education
and in Formation Communities
for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy

Edited by
Enrica Ottone – Luca Pandolfi



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Enrica Ottone, Luca Pandolfi (eds.)
**EDUCATION IN MULTICULTURALITY
EDUCATION TO INTERCULTURALITY**
**In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education
and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy**

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Front cover
Pavel Égüez, *Grito de los Excluidos*, mural en cerámica.
Cotacachi, Ecuador 2001
(Photograph by Luca Pandolfi, 2007)

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“

Diversity always proves a bit frightening, for it challenges our securities and the status quo. [...] In the face of cultural, ethnic, political and religious diversity, we can either retreat into a rigid defense of our supposed identity, or become open to encountering others and cultivating together the dream of a fraternal society.

”

POPE FRANCIS

Speech to the Hungarian Episcopal Conference
Apostolic visit to Budapest, September 12, 2021

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From the Editors

This volume – *Education in Multiculturalism, Education to Interculturalism* – is the outcome of an action-research project funded by GHR (Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhurst) Foundation, Minneapolis (MN, USA), conducted in Italy over four years (2018-2021), and concluded with an international and highly attended (both online and on-site) International Congress in Rome (November 17-19, 2021). The action-research group was made up of a considerable number of participants from Ecclesiastical Institutions of higher education and formation communities of female and male Consecrated Life Institutes in Italy – in particular, only institutions and communities with a highly multicultural population (teachers, students, people in formation) have been selected.

This book is prefaced by a scholarly authority in the field, Darla K. Deardorff and offers the readers (Part I and II) the methodology and results of the action-research conducted by a multidisciplinary team (coordinators: Enrica Ottone and Luca Pandolfi). Part III presents a number of case studies of religious formation in multicultural contexts, resulting in innovative intercultural experiences. Part IV presents some of the field-related scientific Congress proceedings, which would hopefully enhance the research on how a formation in a multicultural context can promote intercultural competences. Part V provides the qualitative and quantitative instruments of the action-research: summaries of the focus groups, the guide of the interviews, and the structured questionnaire translated into nine languages. By March 2022 the final manuscripts were submitted to UUP.

Research and discussions results can be outlined as follows: in the education communities involved in the action-research, multiculturalism is a *fait accompli* while interculturalism does not actually go beyond the formal level of the declarations of intents; difficulties persist in the implementation of systematic research and planning; program actions aimed at an enduring formation that promotes, supports and fosters the now increasingly needed intercultural competences are barely incipient. Nevertheless, although we still have a long way to go, we got going.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|----------|--|
| AIEA | Association of International Education Administrators |
| AVEPRO | <i>Agenzia della Santa Sede per la Valutazione e la Promozione della Qualità delle Università e Facoltà Ecclesiastiche</i> [Agency of the Holy See for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties] |
| CARA | Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate |
| CEI | <i>Conferenza Episcopale Italiana</i> [Episcopal Conference of Italy] |
| CISM | <i>Conferenza Italiana Superiori Maggiori</i> [Italian Conference of Men Major Superiors] |
| ESL | English as a Second Language |
| FaTeSi | <i>Facoltà Teologica di ological Faculty of Sicily</i> |
| FCEI | Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy |
| FG | focus group |
| GHR | Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhorst Foundation |
| ICL | Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life |
| ISCSM | <i>Istituto Superiore di Catechesi e Spiritualità Missionaria</i> [Higher Institute of Catechesis and Missionary Spirituality] |
| ITVCC | <i>Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata Claretianum</i> [Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life Claretianum] |
| IUS | <i>Istituto Universitario Sophia</i> [Sophia University Institute] |
| LINFA | <i>Laboratorio Interculturale di Formazione e Accoglienza</i> [Intercultural Formation and Wellcome Workshop] |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| PFSEA | <i>Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium</i> [Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences Auxilium] |
| PIME | <i>Pontificio Istituto Missioni Estere</i> [Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions] |
| PUL | <i>Pontificia Università Lateranense</i> [Pontifical Lateran University] |
| PUU | <i>Pontificia Università Urbaniana</i> [Pontifical Urbaniana University] |
| QCA | Qualitative content analysis |
| SEDOS | Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission |
| STI-PIME | <i>Seminario Teologico Internazionale – Pontificio Istituto Missione Estere</i> [International Theological Seminary – Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions] |
| UISG | <i>Unione Internazionale delle Superiore Generali</i> [International Union of Superiors General] |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UPS | <i>Università Pontificia Salesiana</i> [Pontifical Salesian University] |
| USG | <i>Unione dei Superiori Generali</i> [Union of Men Superiors General] |
| USMI | <i>Unione Superiore Maggiori d'Italia</i> [Union of Women Major Superiors of Italy] |
| VC | <i>Vita Consacrata</i> [Consecrated Life] |





“To Look More Closely”

Keynote address by **Kathleen Mahoney**, GHR
(Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhorst) Foundation Senior Program Officer,
held online at the International Congress of the
Pontifical Urbaniana University, 17 November 2021

Hello everyone. My name is Kathleen Mahoney and I am a senior program officer at GHR Foundation. I am glad to be able to join you today and to bring greetings from the Foundation to those of you who are gathered for this important conversation about multiculturalism and formation of women and men religious.

This congress focuses on an important topic for religious life and for the times. We know that women and men religious have long been people who have crossed borders. For the gospel and for the sake of mission they have crossed many types of borders: those of class, of race and ethnicity, of nations and cultures. They do so today even as, in too many parts of the world, tensions are flaring, as willingness to welcome and engage with others from different nations and cultures – to welcome the stranger – seems to be waning.

For this, we hold up religious life – a life of border crossing for gospel and mission – as a much-needed blessing and a sign of hope. Nevertheless, it is not without its challenges.

At GHR Foundation, it has been my privilege to work closely with sisters from the U.S. and from around the globe. It has provided many opportunities to see, close-up, their leadership, their service, and their spiritual witness. Through this work, I came to know Sister Joyce Meyer, an American sister who is a member of the Congregation of the “Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary”. In her ministry – she has crossed more international borders than anyone I know.

Perhaps because she had travelled so much, she has had a special affinity for sisters in the U.S. who came from other countries. She was in contact with some of them and in some cases, she was concerned about their wellbeing, as they were immersed in new cultures, often with little support from afar or few resources nearby.

Sister Joyce became their prophetic voice, challenging a familiar narrative. Many of us, including myself, knew a long history filled with stories of Catholic sisters from Europe who came to North America with other immigrants. However, that was *history*. However, what about today? Many of us were aware of a growing number of sisters from Central and South America who were in the United States. Nevertheless, Sister Joyce was urging us to look more closely.

At Sister Joyce’s urging, conversations started and a meeting was held among representatives from many groups. As voice upon voice was heard, it became very clear that we did indeed need to look more closely. And so we are especially grateful that a research team based at Trinity Washington University and led by Sr. Mary Johnson stepped up to conduct the first-of-its-kind study of “International Sisters in the United States”. You will be hearing from one of the researchers, Dr. Mary Gauthier, on findings which opened our eyes to the sheer numbers of international sisters, to some of their challenges, and the many ways in which they have been a blessing to so many.

While the numbers of international sisters in the U.S. is impressive, they pale in comparison with those in Rome, the crossroads of the Catholic Church. How fortunate that Sister Patricia Murray, the secretary general of the International Union of Superiors General, held a convening in Rome to share the research and among the par-

ticipants who were gathered, we find professor Luca Pandolfi. Like his counterparts in the U.S., he recognized the importance of the topic for religious life. We are grateful for the partnership between the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) and the Pontifical Urbaniana University, and for the research he has led that to look more closely at religious life, multicultural realities and its importance for formation.

It has been a privilege for GHR to provide support for these research projects. Thank you to all who have advocated for, researched, analyzed, and planned for this gathering and given us the opportunity *to look more closely* at the importance of cultures in the formation of women and men religious.





Preface

Teacher Education and Intercultural Competence

Challenges and the Way Forward

An interview with **Darla K. Deardorff**

by Enrica Ottone and Luca Pandolfi

(10.11.2021)

Darla, you are a research scholar at Duke University and you hold faculty appointments at several other universities around the world. You are founding president of the World Council of Intercultural and Global Competence and you are executive director of the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA). We know learning intercultural competence is the core issue in the internationalization of higher education. So we ask you: What are the priority challenges for teacher training at the higher education level?

There are several challenges for teacher education in higher education, particularly around intercultural competence development, and I want to outline several of those here:

First, it is really important, in regard to integrating intercultural competence into the curriculum for teacher education training, that this goes beyond knowledge. It is not enough to just focus on intercultural knowledge. When we think about intercultural competence, there are also skills: what skills do teachers need, interculturally, to connect with students from so many different backgrounds? It is important that teachers' training intentionally emphasizes not only the intercultural knowledge needed by teachers but also the intercultural skills and competencies needed by teachers. And, as I work with teacher education programs, I am seeing that it really is an area that needs a lot more attention. So that is the number-one challenge.

Secondly, another challenge is how to integrate intercultural competence into all of teacher education curricula. That means not just one course, or one module, where we say, "Ok now we are talking about intercultural competence", but we need to look at how this competence gets integrated throughout the curriculum. What that means and what that looks like is including different perspectives, different resources from around the world, and carefully examining the curriculum insofar as looking at whose knowledge has been privileged in the curriculum, whose voices are included and especially whose voices are missing in the curriculum. It really comes down to more of a social justice focus, even within intercultural competences, so that the curriculum is very carefully reviewed to see, then, in the end, even what is the hidden curriculum, what messages are we sending by what means and how the curriculum is taught. So, there is a lot to this piece on how we integrate intentionally these intercultural dimensions into all of the curriculum for teacher education and development.

So this integration of intercultural competence throughout the curriculum is a huge challenge and one that is really important to address in addition to the challenge of going beyond knowledge to also address intercultural skills. This brings us to a third challenge in teacher education, with regard to intercultural competence development in particular, and that is intercultural assessment and how we assess teachers' inter-

cultural competence. This is one of the main areas of my research and work for quite a number of years now: looking at the assessment aspects, which again need to be integrated into the curriculum not as a pre-post assessment and not focused so much on the results. This means focusing more on the process of developing intercultural competence and not whether teachers are more interculturally competent or not, but it is more about how they can continue to grow and develop interculturally given that intercultural competence is a lifelong process. In the end, assessment becomes much more about the process, assessing the process of development, than the results.

In terms of assessment, what we are seeing is that it is important to move beyond any kind of pre-post measure, to look at the evidence that we can collect within the educational experience and learning, providing that key feedback to teachers as they continue to develop interculturally. In the end, we are seeing more peer assessment, the use of peer assessment and feedback, and ways of looking at how we can support intercultural development. It is not just either you have it or you don't, but how we can continue to support the students' development interculturally and assessing intercultural competence which involves a multi-measure, multi-perspective kind of approach.

The last challenge I will bring to this discussion is that we need to do much more in terms of preparing and supporting the instructors in teacher education. We see that too often the academics, the instructors who are teaching, often don't understand this fully themselves; they need to be able to be better prepared and then supported as they, then go into the classroom to work with the students. That's another challenge that really must be addressed.

So those would be the key challenges I would put forward in this discussion.

What does internationalization mean for university education?

Intercultural competence in university education comes back to seeing intercultural competence as core to internationalization efforts. And, typically, internationalization efforts are seen primarily as mobility, of moving students around the world and, of course, during a pandemic, as we have all been experiencing, that has not been as possible. Through my work with internationalization leaders at universities around the world we really prefer to see this more as comprehensive internationalization at the university level.

Internationalization is so much more than mobility. It is also looking at partnerships at different levels; again, not just mobility partnerships, but in terms of research and collaboration with universities within one's own country and beyond especially. Moreover, the curriculum is at the heart of internationalization. It becomes imperative that intercultural competence be embedded and integrated intentionally throughout the entire curriculum at the university level.

I'll give you one example of how intercultural competence was embedded throughout a public university in the United States. At the top leadership, at the rector level, academics were asked: "Please provide outcomes that are intercultural outcomes for the students". The faculty, the academics at this university, spent several months developing this list of outcomes and they came back with 50 intercultural outcomes for students. The top leadership said: "Thank you. Now I need you, the academics, to prioritize, what are the top five, because fifty are too many. What are the top five intercultural outcomes for students?" And so, again, the academics went to work for many months debating and discussing what were the top five. These are academics from all different areas of the university; from chemistry to music to physical education to language. In the end, they agreed on the top five intercultural outcomes. They then came back to the top leadership saying: "Here you are". The top leadership at the university then said: "Thank you. Now every single academic at this institution needs to include at least two of these five intercultural outcomes in every single course that is taught here, regardless of the course topic".

So, that is one way to more intentionally integrate these intercultural outcomes into all that is taught at the university. That is what we are aiming for, at integrating this throughout at university so that it is not just a one-time experience, or participating in an exchange program; it is not just one course that is required. It is about integrating intercultural, global, international dimensions into every facet of the university including not just in the classroom but outside the classroom, looking at co-curricular opportunities and how we incorporate and embed, integrate, this intercultural global dimension in what happens outside the classroom. That, in the end, becomes comprehensive internationalization and it becomes part of the fabric of the university. That is what we are aiming for in terms of comprehensive internationalization.

The future of education is international. What is your dream about present and future education, especially regarding intercultural competence?

Related particularly with the intercultural dimension of education, I have so many dreams for the future. I look at this more as increasingly a lifelong process. We recognize that, particularly in higher education, we only have students with us for a short time and so, looking at education in a much more comprehensive way into the future, we have to take it as a lifelong process.

Certainly, intercultural competence development is a lifelong process for all of us and so it is important to look at this in the long term. I have been involved in working both with OECD's Education 2030 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), as well as UNESCO at the United Nations in terms of looking at the future of education.

Some of what we have been discussing there is looking at how we can put students at the center of what we do and at empowering students. We need to see education as something we do in partnership with our students, not something we give to them, or do to them. We are working together to co-create education, the knowledge, the skills that are needed for their future. We are looking at this again in terms of a lifelong process, not just something that is done in this short amount of time.

Intercultural education is something that is much more inclusive and comprehensive in terms of access to all that. We are much more aware of the messaging that is done through the curriculum and trying to be more inclusive there, as well. It is not something that remains in the classroom but it is something that we take out into the communities, and we engage in the real world, and with our local communities in very meaningful ways. We see something happening already through, for example, service-learning opportunities in which volunteer service is built into courses where students do go out to the community to engage and, of course, it has been happening for a long time now in some universities and communities.

How can we embrace more of this type of educational approach so that we just don't stay within the four walls of the classroom? There is so much in terms of looking at the future of education, to looking at intercultural competence development. Again, this is not only in the higher education sector, but rather, looking at how we can take this out for all, in many different sectors, whether in social work (it is incredibly relevant), in health care (there is a lot of good work been done in that sector in relation to intercultural competence), even with law enforcement. We need to look at comprehensive ways to address intercultural competence development, across all sectors, because, basically, anyone who works with humans needs intercultural competence.

How do we address intercultural competence for all, and within our local communities, so that such efforts help bridge divides? It can be said that we are living with twin pandemics – we have been faced with the COVID pandemic and in many ways, at least in my country, we have also been faced with a twin pandemic of hate and division.

How can we look to bridge these divides, to bring others together so that we can really understand the oneness of our shared humanity? One of the examples I will give is some of the work I have been doing with UNESCO in trying to address this through something called “UNESCO Story Circles“. We have been using Story Circles around the world not only to help persons develop and practice key intercultural competencies but to also bridge divides – and I should mention that an example of a key intercultural competency practiced in Story Circles is *listening for understanding* – which we seldom do actually and instead as humans we tend to listen for response or for judgment, which is normal – and yet, we need to do more to really begin to understand what it is like to listen to each other for understanding. Bridging divides starts with truly listening to each other. These Story Circles become quite transformational in helping persons embrace our shared humanity as a way of moving beyond our differences.

And I would invite those who were engaged in this International Congress to look into this intercultural methodology of UNESCO Story Circles. It is available through an open access manual in five plus languages, I am not sure it is in Italian yet. It is in Spanish, French, Arabic, Chinese and Russian and more. I would love to connect with anyone who is interested in engaging with that particular methodology and I can be reached through LinkedIn, so we can connect more around Story Circles.

The dream is reaching as many people as possible beyond the walls of a classroom. In the end it is seeing education and intercultural competence development as this lifelong process – a journey that we are all on, that we will hopefully go every day towards something which we don’t know, that we continue to approach every day as an opportunity to learn more, and that we engage with others who are different from us as we move outside our comfort zones daily, and that we look for every opportunity to try to bridge those divides, as we all work together to address the pressing challenges confronting all of us as humans on this earth.

Final words to conclude, Darla...?

I want to thank you so much for this opportunity to be with you in this way. I am so sorry I cannot be there in person. I would welcome any of you to contact me directly through *LinkedIn* and I want to share a special invitation to all of you who are interested in intercultural competence to please join the World Council on Intercultural and Global Competence (www.iccglobal.org). We have numerous working groups on intercultural and global competence through the World Council. Most of the groups are in English and one is in Spanish. So, you are most welcome to join us and be part of this global community of both researchers and practitioners who are connecting with each other, to learn from and with each other, in order to further advance our understanding and praxis around intercultural and global competence development and assessment. Hope to see some of you there at the World Council and again would welcome connecting with you through *LinkedIn*. Thank you again so much for this opportunity to be with you today. Grazie.





Introduction

Education in Multiculturality Education to Interculturality*

❖ Enrica Ottone – Luca Pandolfi

Education in multicultural contexts is nowadays a widespread practice. In Italy, both in ecclesiastical Institutions of higher education as well as in male and female Institutes of consecrated life and of Societies of apostolic life, education and formation¹ communities have been represented by highly international groups for a while. Students, as well as many of their teachers and educators, especially (but not limited to) the Catholic world in Italy, come from all continents. Formation, teaching and education in wide multiculturality is a reality; instead, the education *to* interculturality is a choice, it is certainly a complex task and a challenge, often poorly understood and disregarded.

To the presence and management of the first dimension (education in multicultural contexts) and to the dissemination as well as to the fate of the second (formation of and education *to* interculturality), the Higher Institute of Catechesis and Missionary Spirituality of the *Pontifical Urbaniana University* (PUU) in Rome has dedicated four years of *Action Research* on the field (2018/2021). It involved, in various ways, more than ten ecclesiastical institutions of higher education and more than twelve male and female communities of formation to consecrated life in Italy. Directed first by the theologian Tiziana Longhitano, the project was subsequently guided by Luca Pandolfi, full professor of Cultural Anthropology, who designed, directed, and coordinated the experience of these four years of research, a related international congress, and the publication of the results.

From the very beginning, the International Union of Superiors General (UISG), coordinating body of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life, was involved as a partner in the research. In addition, the research has seen the immediate involvement of the *Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium* (PFSEA)² of Rome, particularly with the figure of Enrica Ottone, professor of Intercultural Pedagogy, who collaborated on the conduction and direction of the Research. The whole experience was made possible thanks to the support and the generous contribution of the GHR (Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhors) Foundation of Minneapolis (USA) which assessed and appreciated the Project entitled *Multiculturality and intercultural competences in ecclesiastical institution of higher education and in formation communities of consecrated life*. Before this synthetic introduction, you may have read the brief but significant greeting of Kathleen Mahoney, GHR Foundation senior program officer: she illustrated why they willed to support the research and how our relationship is not just a mere relationship between a funding body and a beneficiary, but also a collaboration between people that work for a common project in view of a more sensitive and welcoming world for everyone.

The four years of *Action-Research-Training* – afflicted by about two years of several lockdowns due to the Covid19 pandemic, among others – involved Italian academic institutions and formation communities with short experiences (repeated focus groups and other activities conducted with qualitative tools), hence the use of the name *action-research-training*, in which every step and shared content was recorded, collected and stored in an extensive database of textual data and ethnographic notes. The dis-

* Translated from the original Italian by Nina Deliu

semination of a structured questionnaire during the first half of 2021, translated into nine languages and involving around six hundred participants, has then specified the recognition of the actual reality, thanks to its sociometric and quantitative nature. It was important to “listen” to reality, dialogue with the different involved environments, collect and “sediment” words, opinions, ways of living multiculturalism, and experience or imagine intercultural processes. It was important to conjugate these reflections with the education dynamics, “measuring” somehow their convergences and divergences. And it was extremely interesting to try to read and interpret the great amount of information received. This work, which still has to be completed considering the quantity of collected data, has borne two first important fruits: a) a *Report*, with a wide interpretation dictated by multiple voices, on this *action-research-training* project, and b) a three-day international Congress, held at the end of 2021, in which it was presented the *Report* and, even more, where teachers, researchers, scholars, students, people operating in this area, and members of communities of male and female Institutes of Consecrated Life, have gathered to listen and confront to each other.

The publication you are reading, entirely in English, was conceived as a wide extract of the Congress Proceedings, offered online in open access to the scientific community and to the people operating in this area, as well as to all those that may be interested in the dynamics of the intercultural education. It collects principally the research *Report*, but it is enriched with the main contributions shared during the International Congress of the PUU, held in a hybrid format (online and in person) from 17th to 19th of November 2021 and entitled “*Multicultural communities, for what Formation?*”. The congress, which took place while the pandemic was not yet concluded and respected all the health safety rules and social distancing, has seen a daily average of around 450 in-person participants, all spread across the different rooms of the University, with simultaneous translations in Italian, English, French and Spanish. With peaks of 700 online connections and an average of 500 people attending online, the Congress resulted to be an interesting experience transmitted online in real time in four languages on the Zoom platform and differed 6 hours later, on the Institutional YouTube channel of PUU³. Some teachers and speakers were also able to give their contribution with a remote connection from Italian cities or different distant Countries such as Belgium, Chile, India or the United States of America, and the question of interculturality has been intertwined with the cultural processes of global connection and the *digital divide*. Each day, around 1.000 people from different continents and from different time zones were able to listen and share reflections and experiences on multicultural life and intercultural practices, with particular attention to religious formation contexts. In this wide volume, we have collected eighteen contributions distributed across four Parts, in addition to an appendix (Part V), which illustrates both the qualitative and quantitative instruments used during the survey.

We honor the Preface of Darla Deardorff, from Duke University (Durham, NC), collaborator of UNESCO, and internationally known especially for her manuscript on intercultural competence⁴. In a short interview, she illustrates the current challenges on young and adult education, nowadays characterized by a multicultural nature and increasingly calling for a conscious and participative interculturality.

* * *

Parts I and II of this Volume are entirely dedicated to the presentation of our *action-research-training* project. In Part I, the first contribution, authored by the sociologist Mary Gautier from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate of Georgetown University (Washington, DC), shows the historical roots of the research we conducted in Italy: a study on the life of female communities of consecrated life in the USA characterized by strong multiculturalism. It was this study, concluded in 2016 and presented in Italy in 2017, that inspired our research, which we conducted however with

different and specific attention to multicultural “formation”⁵ communities (University institutions or Formation Institutes of Consecrated Life). In the second contribution, you will find the history, the context, the motivations, and the objectives of the *action-research-training* presented by the curators of this Volume (Enrica Ottone and Luca Pandolfi): in an extensive introduction, you will also find details on the adopted theoretical approaches, the methodology, the study sample, and the instruments of the survey. Part II will be then focused on the results obtained so far from the entire research work. A pool of experts (sociologists from qualitative and quantitative areas) collaborated with us and contributed with discussion and supervision roles. In addition, they were specifically responsible for the analysis and interpretation of part of the qualitative and quantitative data we collected: they are Fiorenza Deriu, professor at Sapienza University of Rome, Nina Deliu, researcher at Sapienza University of Rome with a joint appointment at Cambridge University (UK), and Luca Di Censi, from Sapienza University as well. Their contributions to the analysis and reflections on the results are followed by two additional essays. The first one is authored by Enrica Ottone, who analyses the results of a qualitative survey carried out during this research, in light of additional extensive resources at hand, combining in this way two research lines that highlight the intercultural competences put in place. We then have a conclusive essay by Luca Pandolfi, who reinterprets the entire experience and tries to trace a synthesis of the main cultural processes in place in the different educational ecclesiastical structures (universities and formation communities).

* * *

Parts III illustrates experiences of formation in multicultural religious contexts that seek to look at interculturality as a potential way, which however requires a certain awareness and specific competences. They are all short contributions, simple, but able to offer a glimpse of the current dynamics in the Catholic university context as well as in the wide world devoted to Consecrated Life. Robin Seelan, an Indian Jesuit with education partially conducted in the United States of America, briefly presents the fundamental questions related to formation in strongly multiethnic and multireligious contexts in India. The Irish Sister Patricia Murray, executive secretary of the UISG in Italy, illustrates the international work of training for leaders in multicultural communities; Peter Nahr, Ghanaian Verbitte Father, who coordinates the formation of his congregation in Germany and central Europe, indicates the necessary transformations to adopt for promoting intercultural competences among members of different international congregations of consecrated life. Cristina Montoya, a Colombian citizen that teaches in Italy, presents the project and the intercultural experience of an international university (involving teachers and students) created within a global lay movement such as the Focolare Movement. Lorena Zuchel, an academic researcher from Universidad Técnica Federico Santa María of Santiago de Chile, intersects her experience of Chilean higher university education with the challenges posed by intercultural thinking and the local ethnic and linguistic plurality. This section is then closed with the experience of a German Protestant Pastor that works in Italy with communities mainly of African origins.

* * *

Parts IV offers a few scientific and academic thematic insights. The intercultural dimension challenges the disciplinary pathways and the different scientific approaches, asking for an openness to look with continuously new perspectives on a social, cultural, and pedagogical reality that is characterized by a plurality of subjects, perceptions, comprehensions, and interpretations. Here, we have the contributions of Milena Santerini, from the Catholic University of Sacro Cuore of Milano, a known pedagogue

and an expert in intercultural education, involved also as a parliament member in Italy at the level of social policies for inclusion and cultural pluralism; Raul Fornet-Betancourt, one of the founders of the intercultural philosophy in Europe, invites at the dialogue between the European thinking, spread worldwide particularly during the XIX and the XX century also thanks to the colonial experience, and the alternative thinking of the global Asian, African or Latin-American body. He urges to re-think university education as a place of critical and alternative thinking, dialogic and pluralistic, not just as a place of homologating education for the reproduction of a consumer society, inequalitarian and inattentive to diversity. Part IV is closed with the contributions of Davide Zoletto, professor of Pedagogy at the University of Udine, and Ilenya Camozzi, sociologist at the University Milano-Bicocca. Education and human sciences (originated, as we know them in Europe, between the end of the XVIII century and the entire XIX century) are nowadays challenged by a scientific pluralist thinking, international and postcolonial: contents, disciplinary forms, interpretative paradigms, methodological processes are questioned by the different epistemological approaches and by alternative cosmovision of knowledge and its role. An increasing number of students and teachers come from different worlds, bring with them their different approaches, and “filter” the contents they receive, as well as the proposed forms of learning, with different cognitive and experience backgrounds. Education in multiculturalism is already a more or less conscious and slow experience of cultural hybridization. However, when not handled in a conscious and competent way, it is marked by asymmetries, dominations, and different forms of cultural resistance. On the other side, this is also what we perceived during the different phases of this research.

* * *

Ultimately, **Part V** is an appendix of the instruments used during the research. It is intended as a conclusive space, yet *not to conclude*: these instruments can be employed again, improved, implemented, and can represent other experiences of research, action, education, dialogue, and critical awareness for groups and communities.

* * *

We close this introduction by saying that the perception of multiculturalism is certainly a widespread and shared experience, yet not always taken in a deep and conscious way and with sufficient communicative, social, and formative competence. On the other side, interculturality, despite being present in the background of many people and in the formal statements of many communities and education institutions, is not actually subject to a serious and systematic analysis nor to awareness or education: poorly considered are both the careful, in-depth and competent planning as well as the systematic and non-episodic action. We detected how an education that should promote, enable, and support the necessary intercultural competences is nowadays increasingly timely. However, there is still a long path ahead.



Endnotes

1. In this Volume, the word “formation” reflects the Italian concept of “formazione”, and “formative” (the original language of this research), and it is used to refer to a kind of non-physical shaping, related to the development of education and personality in a broad sense. To avoid potential confusion, we will adopt the term “education” when referring to universities and other general contexts, but we will maintain the Italian or Latin similarity when referring to religious institutes; see e.g., the use of the expression “formation in religious institutes” in official Vatican’s documentation: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_02021990_directives-on-formation_en.html; <https://archive.is/FAX53>.
2. The PFSEA [Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences Auxilium] is an ecclesiastical Faculty which was founded canonically at the *Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice* (Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians or Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco) in 1970.
3. Recordings are accessible in other three languages (English, French, Spanish), in addition to Italian, at the following web address: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUPG_Ymjo4MST-PAV4uz4sRA.
4. In English, the terms “competence” and “competency”, as well as their respective plural forms (“competences” and “competencies”) are both used as synonyms. In this volume, by choosing to use the term “competence” in the singular, for consistency, we have chosen to use the plural “intercultural competences” to indicate “more intercultural competences”. We have used the term “competences” in articles translated from Italian or Spanish, but we decided to keep the expression “intercultural competencies” (more frequent in international literature) in some contributions that were written in English, including the interview with Darla K. Deardorff. In the volume she authored for UNESCO in 2020, a passage reads: “Intercultural competencies are broadly defined as the competences (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) needed to improve human interactions across differences, whether within a society (differences due to age, gender, religion, socio-economic status, political affiliation, ethnicity, and so on) or across borders”, (D.K. DEARDORFF, *Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles*, UNESCO and Routledge, Paris 2020, 70).
5. Cf. note 2 above.

Part One

**FROM THE 2016 RESEARCH IN USA
TO THE RESEARCH IN ITALY**
Multiculturality in Life Communities
and Education Communities



International Sisters in the United States of America: A Sociological Study

❖ Mary L. Gautier



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Abstract

Although Catholic sisters have been coming to the United States for religious missions since the 1700s, very little was known about contemporary trends among international women religious working and living in the United States. Researchers from Trinity Washington University and from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University collaborated on the first-ever sociological study of international women religious in the United States. For the purpose of this study, an “international sister” is a woman religious who was born outside the United States and is now living in the United States, in ministry, in study, or in residence here. This study of over 4,000 international sisters from more than 80 countries on seven continents presents a comprehensive portrait of their paths to ministry, challenges, satisfactions, contributions, and advice for those who would come after them.

Keywords

Catholic sisters – International women religious – Migration – Ministry

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1

Introduction

Migration of Catholic women religious to the United States for religious mission is certainly not new – indeed, Catholic sisters from Europe made up the vast majority of women religious ministering in the United States as late as the beginning of the twentieth century¹. Very little is known, however, about more contemporary migration trends among women religious.

This study is the first ever national study of international women religious (i.e., religious sisters and nuns) conducted in the United States. Funded by the GHR Foundation, researchers from Trinity Washington University and from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University collaborated to design and implement the research. For the purpose of this study, an “international sister” is a woman religious who was born outside the United States and is now living in the United States, in ministry, in study, or in residence here. This study uses the term “religious institute” to refer to any religious congregation, order, province, region, or monastery with separate governance. The study distinguishes between U.S. based religious institutes (i.e., those with a motherhouse or province headquarters in the United States) and those individuals and houses of non-U.S. based religious institutes.

The study, conducted in 2015 and 2016, involved three pieces of research. The first was a survey of religious institutes that was addressed to the religious superiors of all U.S. based religious institutes. We sent a brief survey to over 500 U.S. based institutes of women religious and asked them for the names of their international sisters. We received 336 surveys back and the superiors gave us the names of 1,678 international sisters. We also contacted the Vicar for Religious in all U.S. dioceses and asked them for the names of international sisters working in their diocese. This request gave us another 1,866 non-duplicated international sisters.

In all, we located over 4,000 international sisters in the United States, who we then surveyed for the second part of this project. The third piece of research included 26 interviews and focus groups with some of these international sisters, to learn from them in their own words about the challenges and rewards of their experience. The breadth of diversity of the sisters surveyed and interviewed gives a sense of the dynamism of the international dimension of women’s religious life.

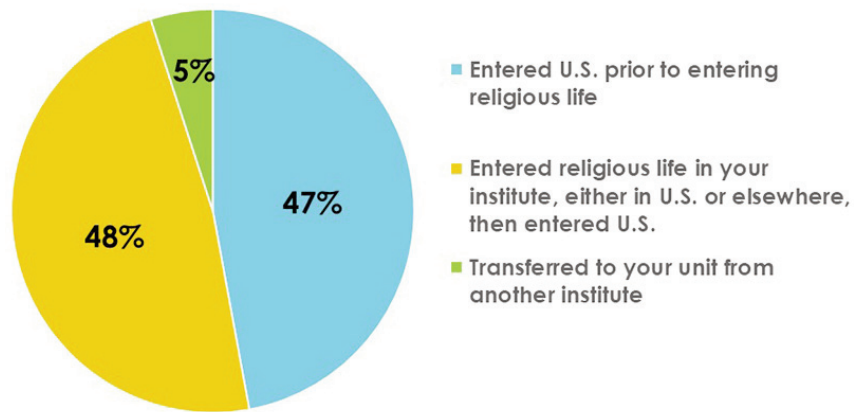
2

Findings from the Institute Survey

Among the women’s institutes that responded to the Institute Survey, about one-third (32%) are small institutes (under 25 vowed members). Another third are “mid-sized”, having between 26 and 100 vowed members, and another third are “large”, with over 100 vowed members. Nearly six in ten (59%) define themselves as being part of an international institute. While four-fifths (81%) of the institutes report having at least one international member, small institutes are the most likely to say that more than half their members are international sisters. Mid-sized and large institutes are more likely to report that less than 10 percent of their members are international.

What can these institutes tell us about the international sisters that are living in the United States? According to the major superiors, nearly half of their international sisters came to the United States first and then entered religious life within the United States. A similar proportion entered religious life first and then came to the United States as international sisters. Just 5% transferred to a U.S. institute from another religious institute outside the United States.

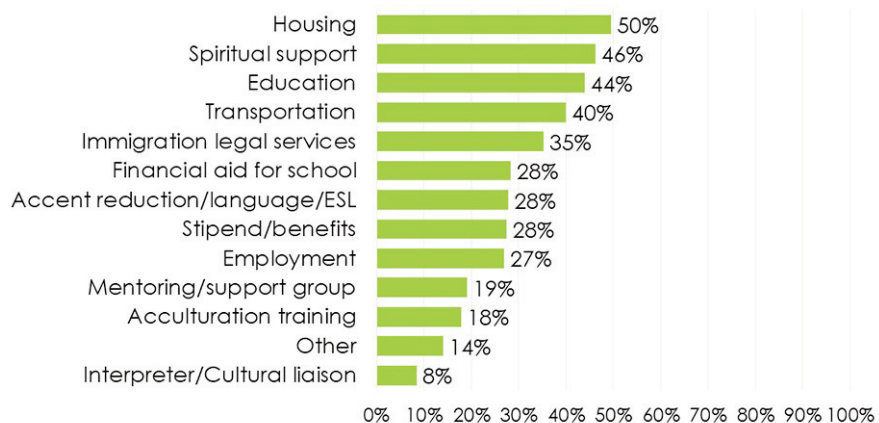
Graph. 1 – Pathways among international sisters in U.S. based religious Institutes



In some cases, U.S. religious institutes offer hospitality or support to individual international sisters from other institutes by hosting them while they are in the United States for study or ministry. It is expected that these international sisters will not stay in the United States but will return to their home country when their study or ministry is completed. Among institutes that have hosted international sisters, about four in ten had at least one international sister who had contacted them from abroad with a request to live with them for a time. About a third had at least one international sister who had contacted them from within the United States with a similar request. Very few had been contacted by a diocese with a request for hospitality for an international sister and just 2% had a sister who just showed up without prior contact or notification.

What sort of support is provided to international sisters who are living in the United States? The most common type of support is housing, followed by spiritual support, education, and transportation. Between 40 and 50% of major superiors have offered one or more of these types of assistance to international sisters.

Graph. 2 – Typical assistance provided to international sisters



More than a third of major superiors say that their institute has provided immigration legal services to international sisters. About three in ten have provided language support, such as accent reduction or English as a Second Language (ESL). Three in ten have provided monetary support, such as financial aid for school, a stipend for ministry, or some type of employment. About one in five have provided mentoring or some type of support group and the same proportion have provided some other type of acculturation training. About one in ten has provided an interpreter or some sort of cultural liaison to international sisters.

The major superiors in these institutes were asked what is most needed to improve the life and ministry of international sisters. The most common response to this question mentioned providing acculturation training or orientation for them. The next most common response referred to language training. Still other responses included assistance with immigration legal services, health service, education, and spiritual formation.

Finally, the major superiors responding for the institutes said that what is most needed is to help the international sisters feel welcomed and supported in the community. They emphasized that it was important for the U.S. born sisters and the international sisters to understand each other's culture.

3

Findings from the International Sister Survey

In mid-2015, we mailed a survey, in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, to 3,544 international sisters who had been identified by religious institutes and diocesan Vicars for Religious. We distributed additional surveys at public presentations and through other organizations with access to international sisters, such as Catholic Extension, the Mexican American Catholic College, Assumption College for Sisters, the African Sisters Education Collaborative, and Formation Support for Vietnam. By early 2016, we received 1,143 completed surveys from international sisters in 257 different religious institutes from 83 countries around the world.

In addition to the written surveys, over the course of a year we conducted 26 interviews and focus groups throughout the United States, with international sisters from 28 countries on five continents. Some participants came from congregations that were primarily white, others from the three traditionally black institutes in the United States, still others from Latina, African, and Asian institutes. The participants varied in age, length of time in the United States, length of time in religious life, and place of entrance (either in their home country or in the United States). The participants included active sisters, retired sisters, and nuns in two monasteries of different traditions. The active and retired sisters represent a variety of institutes, charisms and ministries. The interviewees can be described as progressive and traditional in their theologies, perspectives, and experiences of religious life. Some of them came here as children or teens with their families, and entered religious life here. Most came as adults and either entered here or came here already as sisters to study or work.

Each interview or focus group lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and centered around these four basic questions: 1) The experience of arriving in the United States, 2) The challenges they faced in living and working in the United States, 3) The contributions they make to religious life and ministry in the United States, and 4) Advice they have for future arrivals and those who would welcome them. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed to supplement the quantitative surveys.

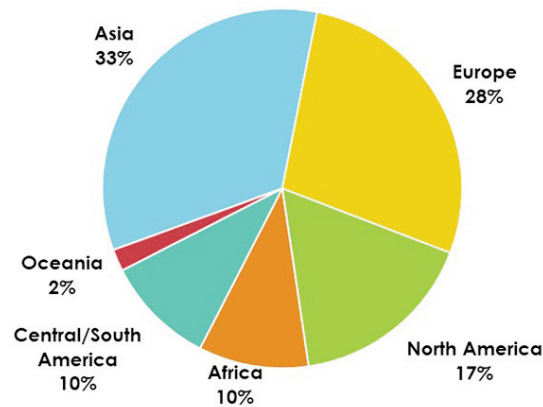
4

Where are they from?

The sisters in this study come from 83 countries across six continents. Asia is the largest sending continent, and Oceania the smallest. One in three responding international sisters was born in one of the Asian nations. Among the Asian international sisters, Vietnam accounts for 44% of the international sisters, the Philippines 24%, and India 23%. Among European sending nations, Ireland accounts for 41%, Poland 18% and Italy 10%. North America is represented by Mexico, which sent 79% of the sisters, and Canada with 21%.

From Africa, 38% of the sisters are from Nigeria, 16% from Uganda, over 10% from Kenya, and 10% from Tanzania. From Central/South America, the four largest sending countries are Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador and Peru. As for Oceania, 71% of the sisters come from Australia and 14% from Samoa.

Graph. 3 – Continent of origin of responding international sisters



5

What was their pathway to the United States?

Almost 40% of responding international sisters entered their current institute outside the United States and then were sent to the United States for ministry. 28% came to the United States before entering religious life. 13% entered their current institute outside the United States, then were sent to the United States for study. 10% were sent to the United States for religious formation.

Tab. 4 – Pathways to the United States

| | % |
|--|----|
| I entered religious life in this congregation outside the United States, then was sent to the United States for ministry | 39 |
| I came to the United States prior to entering religious life | 28 |
| I entered religious life in this congregation outside the United States, then was sent to the United States for study | 13 |
| I entered religious life in this congregation outside the United States, then was sent to the United States for part of my religious formation | 10 |
| I transferred to a U.S. province of my congregation from another province outside the United States | 6 |
| I transferred to my congregation in the United States from another congregation outside the United States | 2 |
| I came to the United States to enter religious life in the United States | 2 |

A smaller number came to the United States via other ways. 6% transferred to a U.S. province of their institute from another province outside the United States. 2% transferred to their institute in the United States from another institute outside the United States. Finally, 2% came to the United States in order to enter religious life.

6

Who are these international sisters?

On average, these international sisters are 58 years old, much younger than the typical U.S. born sisters. Nearly all of them are in active ministry – only one in ten is over age eighty and most likely no longer in active ministry. On average, they entered religious life at age 23 and entered the United States at age 30. They have been serving in the United States for an average of 27 years.

Tab. 5 – Characteristics of international sisters

- Average age is 58
- Nine in ten are active
- On average, entered religious life at age 23 and entered the U.S. at age 30

| Length of Time in United States | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| 15 years or fewer | 41% |
| 16–30 years | 20% |
| 31–50 years | 18% |
| 51 years or longer | 21% |
| Average years | 27 |
| Median years | 22 |

About one-third of responding international sisters identifies as Asian/Pacific Islander. Another third identifies as European, Canadian, or Australian. One fifth identifies as Latin American/Mexican. And one in ten identifies as African or Afro-Caribbean.

Tab. 6 – Characteristics of international sisters

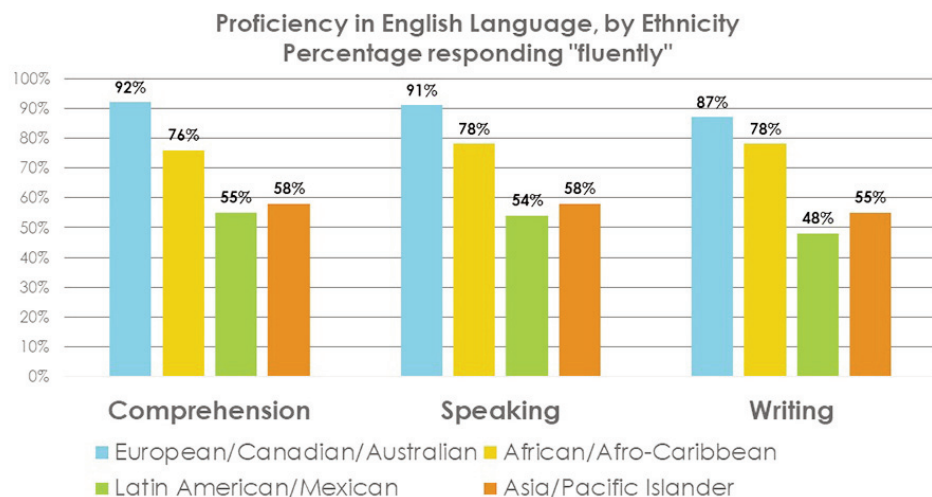
| What best describes your primary ethnicity/cultural background? | |
|---|----|
| | % |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 35 |
| European/Canadian/Australian | 33 |
| Latin American/Mexican | 21 |
| African/Afro-Caribbean | 11 |

7

How proficient do they consider themselves to be in the English language?

70% of the responding international sisters are fluent or native in English language skills. A quarter or more comprehend, speak, and write in English at a minimum proficiency. Only 4 to 6% have no or limited English proficiency. The longer international sisters stay in the United States, the more fluently they master the English language.

Graph. 7 – Proficiency in English



Of course, those whose native language is English as well as those who have English as a secondary language taught in the schools of their country are more likely to have English proficiency. International sisters from Latin America and from Asia are less likely to be fluent in English and to need assistance in acquiring English proficiency.

8

What is their level of education?

The responding international sisters are highly educated. More than seven in ten earned an undergraduate or graduate degree. More than one in ten completed some college and another 2% have a trade school or technical school certificate. Just over one in ten has completed only secondary school or less.

Tab. 8 – Level of education

| | % |
|--|----|
| Graduate or professional degree | 53 |
| College or university undergraduate degree | 20 |
| Some college, but not a bachelor's degree | 14 |
| High school/Secondary school or less | 11 |
| Trade or technical school | 2 |

9

What are their current ministries?

85% of the respondents are in active ministry. Of those, 21% serve in parish/diocesan/ethnic group ministry. 20% serve in hospital/health care ministry. 15% serve in education, with another 1% serving in campus ministry. 14% are students. 13% serve their institutes in leadership, vocation and formation work. 9% serve in social service ministry, and 5% are contemplatives living in monasteries. 3% responded as serving in other ministries, most of which are spiritual direction or retreats.

Tab. 9 – Level of education

| (Among respondents who are active in ministry) | % |
|--|----|
| Parish/diocesan/ethnic group ministry | 21 |
| Hospital/healthcare ministry | 20 |
| Education/teaching | 15 |
| Student at a U.S. college/school of theology | 14 |
| Congregational/formation/vocation ministry | 13 |
| Social services ministry | 9 |
| Contemplatives | 5 |
| Campus ministry | 1 |
| Some other response | 3 |

10

What do these international sisters say to us?

As mentioned above, in addition to the rich data from the survey of international sisters, we also conducted 28 interviews or focus groups with 75 international sisters. Each interview or focus group lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and centered around these four basic questions: 1) Their experience of arriving in the United States, 2) The challenges they faced in living and working in the United States, 3) The contributions they make to religious life and ministry in the United States, and 4) Advice they have for future arrivals and those who would welcome them. We analyzed all that qualitative data and have distilled from it some important lessons that can help those who leave their homeland for mission as well as those who welcome them and seek to support them in their lives and ministries. Here are some of our findings, summarized by us and illustrated by the words of the sisters themselves.

11

Welcoming international sisters: culture shock or homecoming?

Although they may seem comparatively trivial, the daily practical problems in adjusting to the different food, weather, and language of their new home loom large in the experiences of the international sisters in the focus groups. By far the most common difficulty mentioned was with becoming comfortable with the language. One sister told us: “My problem was the English language. I could understand nothing. And I was worried about how long it would be like that. But after a few months, I just started catching the words and I started to understand the whole sentences. Of course, I went to community college. And every day, I went there to learn English”.

Even the sisters from countries where English was a common language found adjusting to American English difficult, whether because of the unfamiliar accent or the speed at which Americans speak. Said one sister: “So actually, we learned American English from the kids. And then when we spoke in English in the beginning, they asked us ‘are you speaking in Spanish?’. Actually, we spoke English in India as we learned it there. So they did not know the accent”. Another sister told us: “In my country, we don’t speak English. We speak English in school, but we don’t use it. We use our mother tongue, which is Swahili. So at first it was very hard for me to speak English. We spoke British English. And here it is American English”.

But the sisters also told us that surmounting this challenge was made easier by the sisters who welcomed them to the United States. Said one: “I thought I knew English. But when I came here, the difficulty was the diction was different and I was not understood. And I did not understand them. Luckily one sister was compassionate and said, ‘OK, every weekend, you come here and we will teach you’”. Another said: “The language is difficult – it’s still difficult sometimes, but the key is if you are open to learn new things, it’s always provided. And I did receive a lot of support from the community”.

Other practical difficulties involved adjusting to the food and the weather in the United States. One sister described it this way: “The most difficult thing I found when I came to the U.S. was the food, because I lived in the residence. And the food was hospital food. So the first two weeks, I ate green apples, so I lost a lot of pounds. I did not want the food except some corn in the hospital. That was the only thing I would eat”. Another told us: “That was the first time in my life I saw snow. It was in 1964, I had not seen snow in my whole life and I thought I would freeze to death”.

And it was not just the unfamiliar food that was a problem, but also unfamiliar customs involved in preparing and eating it: One sister told us: “Eating in the morning by myself, eating lunch by myself and seeing people only in the morning and evening was hard because it is very different than what we had at home. There, we prepared breakfast together and everybody would eat. Somebody would make the

food, somebody made the coffee and we prepared everything together and ate together. Lunch the same thing, dinner the same thing. So everybody, especially for meals, we worked together”.

For many, especially for those who had been sent to the United States alone to study, being so far from friends, family and the rest of their congregation meant that they had to deal with loneliness. For the sisters who came as a group sent to establish a house of their institute in this country, on the other hand, loneliness was less of a problem. One sister said: “When Mother asked me to go work in the U.S., it was hard to leave the country, the family, and the sisters. But I came here, we had five sisters here already, so seeing the five sisters here, I felt like I was with the sisters in my community. I had a very blessed experience coming here for the first time. And they treated me exactly like I was at my motherhouse back in India. So I did not feel much homesick the first time. But my family had so many struggles leaving me this far away”.

12

Satisfactions and challenges of life in the United States

Almost all of the international sisters reported to us in their survey responses that they were satisfied with their housing, food, health care, and transportation. They told us that they were satisfied with the support they receive from the sisters in their local house, from their institute, from their family, and from their diocese. One sister told us: “I was welcomed when I came to the United States. They tried to help me always. They gave me so much courage. They made me feel very good”. Another sister said: “When I came to the airport, I saw somebody holding up a sign saying, ‘Welcome Sister!’ They said, ‘We know that you are lonely and we are here for you. Just make yourself at home. And if you need anything, please let us know’. So I felt like I was at home”.

We learned though, particularly through the focus groups and interviews, that coming to live and work in another country brings with it many challenges, even in the best of circumstances. One sister told us how nervous she was in the face of all the strangeness she encountered. She said: “My self-confidence was not very high when I first entered the United States. I don’t know if it was connected to being in a new country. In my feelings, it was like, ‘I can’t do this right; I can’t do that right’”. Another told us: “I was very hopeful, very curious, and very ready, but I was also very afraid and skeptical. I don’t have any family members here. So I discovered that Nigeria is as big as just one state. And the U.S. has 51. Then I thought, ‘Oh my God, I will be like a drop of water in the ocean!’ So I would be lost. And I would be so insignificant. Where I come from, everybody knows each other. It is a community. But here, the complexity gave me the sense of being lost in this space, where nobody knows me. In addition, I was very lonely. I missed home. I had a lot of homesickness at the beginning. And I was afraid of doing the wrong thing. I didn’t want to be put in the spotlight, I didn’t want to do something to make people ask, ‘Where are you from?’”

Even in their ministry and in their spiritual life, the sisters related to us some of the challenges they faced in trying to fit into a new culture. Said one sister: “In my country, we sisters had a place that we called the chapel and it’s especially for prayer. You can go there to do your personal prayer and your community prayer. When I got here, we had to pray in the living room, and I said, ‘Where is the chapel?’ That was very hard for me to get used to”. Another told us: “In my country, we had a big group so you can share: you go into ministry and you share your ministry together. Nowadays, here, they do it differently, you are just alone. Maybe you are lucky and you have another companion but they live in another house and not close by”.

Similar misunderstandings arose concerning expectations about the spiritual life. One Mexican sister recounted how confused she had been when her American novice director asked her: “Who is God for you?” She said: “Why did she ask me this per-

sonal question? But later I understood that it was kind of sharing where I was in my spiritual life”.

Many times, these sisters tell us that they had difficulty adapting to different cultural assumptions, in their relationships with U.S. sisters as well as in their relationships with their sisters back home. As one sister noted: “We as Peruvians have this way of saying things. We are very straightforward and it can sound rude. As a simple example, I am short and everybody in Peru would call me something referring to my height, like ‘shorty’ or whatever, or another nickname and it was OK, but here you can’t call another person a nickname because it’s not polite. That’s the way we love each other over there”. Another sister told us of an unfortunate experience she observed in her community: “I think of the first Vietnamese sister that we had. She was coming to look at transferring into our community. I remember she had barely been there a week or two. And I remember she came over to me in tears. And what it was, she had picked up her bowl like this to eat her rice, soup, or whatever it was. And one of the American sisters slapped her hand, and said, ‘In our culture, we do not eat it that way’, and ‘It is rude’ and all that stuff”.

The biggest challenges for most of these international sisters are learning how to fit in, to feel comfortable in another culture. They have to learn to live and speak in another language, even if that means taking a step back to go back to school. One sister told us: “I had already finished college in my country, but when I arrived here I had to start everything over from square one. I had to go back to school to learn everything again, and the language is hard”. They are regularly misunderstood when they try to communicate, which can be humbling and humiliating. They make mistakes, even when they are trying very hard to fit in. Said one sister: “Well, one day when I was going to iron my skirt, somebody’s skirt was on the ironing board. So I ironed it and hung it up and then I ironed my skirt. And the sister came out from the shower. Out loud at 6:30 in the morning she said, ‘Who did my skirt?’ I said, ‘Good morning, Sister. I ironed it’. She yelled, ‘I can do it myself!’ I was really surprised that instead of saying thank you, you know, she was mad at me”.

Loneliness is a big challenge for these sisters, even though they are nearly all living in community. One sister told us: “I feel so alone because where I live, everybody goes to work and I am here by myself and I feel the loneliness. Loneliness is hard because the sisters here have their own lives – they are working or each one has their own space”. Another told us of her feeling of isolation in these words: “One thing is I don’t have my own community here. I am the only one that is here, so I live in a different community with sisters, and they are very nice so far. But I am so used to living with my own community of sisters because community life there is so much different from here and we are so community bonded in terms of prayer life and community life and apostolic life. So the community life is better there”.

Another very difficult challenge for international sisters, and one which we had not really anticipated, is how to maintain their involvement with their congregation back home and participate in the life of their institute. Nearly three in five told us that they are at least somewhat concerned about this. This is much more than simple loneliness, it has to do with a sense of responsibility to their sending community as well as a feeling of isolation or alienation from them. Said one sister: “I feel very responsible because, being alone, I have so much burden on my shoulders in terms of the ministry here. My leadership team has such high expectations for me and because I am here alone, I have to stay on track”. Another sister described her feelings of alienation from her congregation like this: “When we go back home, to meet our sisters at the motherhouse, for example, sometimes they don’t understand our different points of view on many things. Sometimes, I don’t tell everything I experience here because I don’t want to shock them”.

Contributions of international sisters to life in the United States

But theirs is not a story only of difficulties encountered and challenges overcome. The international sisters are truly a blessing and a gift to the Church in the United States. They bring an international awareness to sisters in congregations who have been for too long inward-looking and culturally closed off. Said one sister: “I know one thing that I notice we international sisters bring to the United States: we bring an awareness of a new person coming to our congregation from another country, who needs a helping hand, needs someone to walk with them and tell them some of the things that we found out the hard way”. Another sister spoke of how having international sisters encouraged the U.S. sisters to learn a second language: “We were at an international gathering of sisters last month. There were Egyptians, Haitians, Cameroonians, Vietnamese, and Filipinos. Seven languages, can you imagine, at one table? It gives us more perseverance to learn another language, like I have English and Spanish, and some of the others, it’s amazing – some of them speak three or four languages!”.

The international sisters also bring a diversity in prayer and worship styles to the United States, which deepens and enriches the experience for all. One African sister described her experience in this way: “For example, like this being the South, we know that here you have a lot of descendants from Africa. We bring our culture to this place, like our dancing. Because in the Catholic Church the worship is the same around the world, but they can also learn different ways of dancing and so we add flavor to worship in terms of our dancing and our songs”. Another sister told us: “I do home health care, and the family that I work with are Catholics, but they don’t understand what the rosary is all about. I taught them the rosary. They are wonderful people because they always see me with my rosary. When I work there, I sit down and continue my rosary. They are happy now that they enjoy the rosary, so I gave them the rosary”.

Perhaps the greatest gift that the international sisters bring to the Church in the United States, though, is the gift of intercultural understanding. Said one sister: “I think the greatest contribution that the international sisters can make is their openness and their presence. Once people see them, they think to themselves: ‘Oh, we are not just Americans. Somebody else is here’. The international sisters are accepting the culture here at the same time that the people here are trying to learn our own culture, trying to fit in and make it beautiful”. Another sister explained it this way: “I think the richness of international sisters is not only for the community but also for the Church. I think the difference in the Church now is its diversity, and as a diverse group we offer different stages and so people might open different eyes to see; we see things in different ways. I think we give a lot of richness to the Church and to the community”. Finally, one sister described how the presence of sisters from Africa is making it possible for her congregation to thrive: “You see, my congregation is on the verge of revitalization at this point and I think that would not be happening without sisters coming from Africa to add to the sisters here, to our number, because we are not getting more vocations here from the United States, for my congregation. So I feel that the sisters coming from Africa are also contributing somehow to the congregation to go on, to move ahead”.

Implications and recommendations from the research

We are particularly sensitive to the many and difficult challenges that international sisters, along with all newcomers to the United States, face in a new society and especially one as complex as this country. In the course of our research, we discovered that there is not just one story, there are many stories. Individual sisters told stories of dealing with spiritual and cultural differences – like different liturgical styles and different food and weather – and with emotional issues, especially loneliness. They spoke of problems with some U.S. born sisters and laity who did not always welcome

them and of problems with some religious superiors and clergy, sometimes from their home country. They had to adjust to a more individualistic society, with more bureaucracy, credentialing, and criminal background checks, even involving ministry, a startling change for some of them. They had to adjust to a pluralistic society of many religions and ethnic groups, to a huge Catholic Church with hundreds of dioceses and religious institutes and a variety of parish and diocesan cultures, and to a religious life of multiple ministries and charisms. In the midst of this, they share in the multiple political and social challenges facing the millions of immigrants in this country at this time. Thus, their collective identity is a complex one, and one that is too often hidden in plain sight. While the resiliency shown by the sisters is inspiring, the need for the Church and the people of the United States to grow in understanding about the challenges of migration is urgent. As Pope Francis reminded us in his visit to the United States in 2015, we are a nation of immigrants. We can also say that we have been and still are a Church of immigrants.

These international sisters in the United States are part of the complex migration patterns that circle the world at this time. While a century ago, many European sisters left their home countries to serve in the Americas, Asia and Africa, and while we know that today sisters in Asia, Africa and Latin America are sent to serve in North America and Europe, we also realize that the picture is more complex than a simple reversal of mission². Sisters from the North and South cross paths, creating new patterns of international relationship and ministry that have the potential for even greater collaboration and effectiveness in ministry, and a renewed energy for the building up of religious life and the Church, in even greater service to the world.

While the primary focus of our research was on institutes and sisters, we learned of organizations, networks and structures that have been developed or are evolving in response to the needs and contributions of international sisters. More research needs to be done on the growth and development of organizations like these so that ideas can be exchanged as new needs emerge and solutions evolve. We wrote a book, *Migration for Mission*³ that provides more details from these qualitative and quantitative data, along with more description of the networks and structures being developed by and for international sisters, in order to provide a more accurate understanding of the many dimensions of religious life in this country today. We recommend that book as a resource for those who are struggling to deal with diversity in religious life. We are grateful to the generosity and vision of GHR who funded the study, to all who supported us in our work, and, finally, to the witness of the extraordinary international sisters of today who follow in the long line of sisters across centuries and nations who left their home country to minister in a new land, for a short while or forever, for the sake of the Gospel.



Endnotes

1. Cf. M.S. THOMPSON, *Cultural Conundrum: Sisters, Ethnicity, and the Adaptation of American Catholicism*, "Mid-America: An Historical Review" 74 (1992) 3, 205-230; G.C. STEWART, *Marvels of Charity*, Our Sunday Visitor Press, Huntington, IN 1994; P. WITTEBERG, *The Rise and Fall of Catholic Religious Orders: A Social Movement Perspective*, SUNY Press, Albany, NY 1994.
2. Cf. C.N. MBONU, *Reversed Missionary Action: Prospects and Challenges for African Women Religious*, "Religious Life Review" (2016) 217-228.
3. Cf. M. JOHNSON – M.L. GAUTIER – P. WITTEBERG – T.T. DO, *Migration for Mission: International Catholic Sisters in the United States*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY 2019.



Interculturality in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities

An Action-Research-Training Project in Italy*

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Abstract

This contribution is the Introductory Chapter and description of the research project *Multiculturality and intercultural competences in ecclesiastical institutions of higher education and in formation communities of consecrated life*, carried out in Italy in the years 2018-2021 at some ecclesiastical institutions of higher education and at some formation communities of both female and male Institutes of Consecrated Life. The authors, directors of the research, recount the origins and development of the project, illustrate the conceptual framework of the research, the objectives, the hypothesis and the methodological choices. They also present the sample and the instruments of animation and qualitative and quantitative investigation used to collect information and carry out activities that had a certain formative impact on the realities involved. The general objective of the Action Research was to understand the present or absent transformations regarding formative experiences and intercultural competences in highly multicultural educational contexts.

Keywords

Action Research – Multicultural communities – Formative communities – Intercultural competences – Intercultural training – Higher education

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* Translated from the original Italian by Janet Bowker

1

Introduction

This contribution presents a brief historical survey, together with the theoretical framework and methodology adopted, in the realization of an action-research-training project carried out in Italy over a time span of 2018 to 2021, *Multiculturalism and intercultural competences in ecclesiastical institution of higher education and in formation communities of consecrated life*, with the participation of a number of ecclesiastical institutions of higher education and with some formative communities of Institutes of Consecrated Life (both female and male), and Societies of Apostolic Life (henceforth ICL, for brevity). The general objective of the project was to elucidate the current, or even absent, transformations regarding the training experience, and to delineate the nature of the intercultural competences developed by those taking part in highly multicultural training contexts. Before describing the research project design, it is useful to reconstruct the context in which the project developed, as well as the theoretical framework which guided the team in the formulation and conceptualization of the investigation's hypotheses and target focus. In the second part of the Chapter we illustrate the sampling procedures used, the methodology adopted, and the instruments of social enquiry utilized in the collection of information and in the realization of the learning experiences activated in the contexts and realities involved.

2

The origins of the research

The project took off following an academic survey carried out in the United States of America into the local dynamics of multiculturalism in female, catholic Institutes of Consecrated Life (ICL). Led by Trinity Washington University and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), Georgetown University of Washington DC, the research project *International Sisters in the United States* was presented in Rome, at the beginning of 2017, at the *Unione Internazionale delle Superiori Generali* (UISG), which deals with the coordination of the congregations of the female Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life¹.

Several professors from the *Istituto Superiore di Catechesi e Spiritualità Missionaria* (ISCSM), *Pontifical Urbaniana University* (PUU), were present on this occasion, including the acting rector of the time, father Alberto Trevisiol, "Missionario della Consolata", and full professor of History of the Mission. Father Trevisiol conceived the idea to see how far, and in what way, the ISCSM, characterized over a long period by a strong internationalization of both faculty staff and students, and containing a notable number of consecrated women, could possibly reproduce and be in line with the results emerging from the American research, while, at the same time prompting the compilation of a research thesis which dealt with their own specific context.

Professor Tiziana Longhitano, then acting dean of ISCSM, together with professor Luca Pandolfi, full professor of Cultural Anthropology and professor of Sociology of Religion at the same institute, hence decided to put together a small team for the elaboration of a research project. It immediately became clear that they needed to widen their scope, delineate more closely the nature of the knowledge to be gained from the attempt, describe the methodology to be adopted with precision, involve more parties, and also to envisage adequate financing to sustain the whole initiative.

Half-way through 2017, the ISCSM (PUU), in partnership with UISG, and in collaboration with the *Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium* (PFSEA), Rome, (with, in particular, professor Enrica Ottone, professor of Intercultural Pedagogy) all decide to launch a project similar to the American one, but with several significant differences. Unlike the research conducted in the USA, which was focused on multicultural cohabitation among female ICL, the Italian investigation would include both a male and a female reference population. There would be less emphasis on the

dynamics of cohabitation, and more on the dynamics and content of learning, and also, other than ICL, the enquiry would be extended to include ecclesiastical institutions of higher education. The objective was to involve a number of Italian pontifical academic institutions strongly marked by multiculturalism among faculty staff and students, while, in parallel, giving cognizance to multicultural education within the communities of consecrated life, extended to both female and male houses, located in Rome but also in other parts of Italy. In some ways a possible comparison was envisaged, but also a significant convergence: over a substantial majority of students in the ecclesiastical academic institutions selected for the research as well as on the high degree of international provenance, which was, and still is, represented by the members of ICL communities dealing with formation.

The project was presented to the GHR Foundation, evaluated in detail, and at the end of 2017 was accepted with enthusiasm and received financing, not only because it constituted the development and application of a valid preceding piece of research (the American one)², but also because of its innovative content and methodology, and the accompanying chances of acquiring new knowledge and competences in the process.

3

The context, the motivations and relevance of the research project

The topic area and the human experience which are the subjects of this investigation are not entirely new. The ICL had been reflecting for years on the themes of multiculturalism, interculturality, and, above all, on the community and pastoral dynamics associated with these. Instead, in the Italian context, the local state or private universities have been looking at the internationalization of their members only recently, and systematically only from the second decade of 2000³: it is a new phenomenon. This is not the case for the pontifical universities and faculties in Italy: for years they have been marked by a substantial presence of students, teaching staff and trainers of international provenance. But there doesn't seem to have been much consistent reflection on these issues until now. During the preparation and execution phase of the project it was the ICL who recounted how the subject and the question of multiculturalism had been "fashionable" for some time and how, in the last few decades, it had come to occupy the attention of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. A lot less so for the ecclesiastical universities. Generally speaking, the topic had found a place recently in university study structures as single, specific courses, and for some time now in human sciences curricula, but it has appeared a lot less in university education and formation in philosophy and theology⁴.

Over the last ten years we have often shared stories with other researchers involved in the project about our work as educators or public speakers, and our participation in events related to the theme of multiculturalism, connected to community life or pastoral, mission experience in multifarious contexts. However, even though this be the case, in Italy, research into the subject is limited. What is missing is reflection on the role of academic education in philosophy, theology, pastoral care and the human sciences, together with research which is not so much concentrated on intercultural community dynamics, but, rather, on formation in the ICL, given the high level of multicultural presence in Italy.

It could be said that the research carried out by Trinity Washington University and the CARA of Georgetown University, presented in 2017 at UISG, although characterized by a rare, rigorous and comprehensive quantitative analysis, was only the last of many initiatives on the subject which we came to know about, and with which some of us had become involved. The same UISG had also organized various initiatives, culminating in 2020, in training courses for community leaders, which were consistent

and well-organized, dedicated to the management and overseeing of multicultural communities⁵. No less, the “Unione dei Superiori Generali” (USG) [Union of Superiors General], the international coordination of the leadership of the male ICL, had treated the topic of multiculturalism over the same period⁶. Above all, the ICL missionaries were active in the field. The male community “verbita” (“Società del Verbo Divino”) and the female “Serve dello Spirito Santo” had already been aware and productive for years⁷, in collaboration with SEDOS⁸, continuing their long story of reflection and innovative practice⁹. Also the missionary family “comboniana”, since 1999, had highlighted the issue of congregational innovation¹⁰, which was subsequently treated in the “Capitoli generali” (2015), “Assemblee inter-capitolari” and research seminars and workshops (2018)¹¹. We also note great attention to the theme among the “Missionari della Consolata”¹², the “padri Orionini”¹³, etc. The list would indeed be a long one. We also received a great deal more information during the course of the research project, when we were able to listen carefully, raise the issue of ICL in Italy, and share with others some of our intuitions about our investigations into the Italian ICL context¹⁴.

While, on the one hand, the subject was (and continues to be) very topical, on the other hand it often appears to be something that is always starting off but never goes anywhere in a concrete way. It is dealt with on many occasions but never transformed into structural or paradigmatic reform, focused on in various contexts but always depicted as viewed from an unreachable horizon, and instigating systemic and systematic change only with difficulty.

It seems to me that until now – said father Palmiro Mileto, “comboniano” – in our institute there has been uncertainty and discontinuity when addressing this subject, in spite of the production of specific documentation and expressed concern from senior sources, for example by the formative assembly. The possible cause for this uncertainty and discontinuity could possibly be traced to a lack of a basic coherent policy, which from an educational point of view, adopts the intercultural dimension as an integral part of the training process curriculum¹⁵.

The motivations for this research can be summed up in the above quotation. We have been prompted by the desire to understand why, given the fact of widespread multiculturalism, understood to mean the co-existence of people with different linguistic, cultural and national backgrounds (and also generational), this is not reflected in many catholic, ecclesiastical learning environments: the need for competent and profitable interaction, contact and exchange, and reciprocal transformation through operational and forward-looking intercultural dynamics. We have tried to understand the lack of educational practices able to produce and guide the necessary competences to live in a multicultural reality, and create collectively, *interculturality*. Where do the key paths lie? Yet, despite this admission of criticality, we are also looking to identify efficacious experiences and good practices, where they exist.

Having been close to a number of ecclesiastical university contexts with a high multicultural intake, both in faculty staff and students, the questions we have posed are the following: does plurality exist in the courses? Is linguistic diversity accommodated? And as importantly, is course content broadened, reinterpreted and transformed in order to respond to diverse learning paradigms, pedagogic models and content plurality? Given the fact that many of the people who attend these ecclesiastical academic institutions are also members of ICL, living in a formative context of some kind, the next question to ask is: given the multicultural nature of these training *loci*, between trainers and trainees, is there an awareness and are there operational practices in place which adopt models, methods and learning content appropriate to and in line with creating an intercultural reality, which go beyond questions of mere cohabitation?

We are aware of the extensive bibliography on the subject, and starting from our own personal experience, we know that in learning communities characterized by a high level of internationalization it is rare that *multiculturalism* is perceived as the chance to develop *interculturality* through a slow, complex but enriching process which allows people to acquire a sum of *intercultural skills*, indispensable for all contexts of work and life. Even though multiculturalism is an inescapable reality, it is not hard to encounter the lack of its address, and even its denial, in some way. Or it becomes the subject of many discussions but seldom becomes the object of true exchange and transformation practices. The problematic is to understand why. What are the conceptual and operational links and how are they perceived by the people receiving education in universities and the formative communities of the ICL, as well as by their own educators and trainers?

Because of the above considerations, since the beginning, the research group decided to promote a process which was the most participatory possible, involving the chosen contexts, university institutions and the learning communities of the Consecrated Life, inviting them to become *partners* and not only the objects of study. This was not only a question of acquiring permission or inviting them to render their environments to investigation – it was a request to consciously participate and benefit from an opportunity for shared reflection and formation, to furnish space and time to research and also include collaborators working inside the institutions. We asked, from the outset, for them to be with us in living the process, monitoring and participating in the interpretation of the information we gathered.

We proposed, from the outset, a qualitative research methodology using open interviews, but particularly on the use of focus groups, offering a series of interviews with the same group. This is at variance with the classical single encounter. It was important and useful for our investigation to construct a micro-training experience from which the local institution itself could benefit and go deeper while we were collecting lexical items, discourses, ways of seeing and experiencing the dynamics of multiculturalism. From this arose the *epithet* action-research-training. This innovative approach has produced a great deal of fruit, but at the same time has proved not to be without its problematic side, both for those coordinating and managing the research and also for the participants involved.

4

The research group

As we mentioned previously, the research group was led from the beginning by a restricted team, composed of, for the PUU, the dean of ISCSM at the time, the theologian, Tiziana Longitano, and professor Luca Pandolfi, anthropologist and sociologist, as well as scientific director of the research. For the UISG, Sister Elisabetta Flick participated in the early phase, a sister involved in the training field, in multiculturalism and the defence of human rights¹⁶. For the PFSEA, and present from the outset there was professor Enrica Ottone, “Figlia di Maria Ausiliatrice”, pedagogist and, with Luca Pandolfi, scientific co-director of the research. It is no accident that this report was written by these two people.

However, the team was immediately enlarged and other teachers and educators from various universities or congregations became involved: Lucia Abignente, theologian, professor at the *Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata Claretianum*, Mariolina Cattaneo, “comboniana” missionary, trainer and professor at PUU, Vito Impellizzari, theologian and director of the *Istituto Superiore di Scienze religiose* of the *Pontificia Facoltà Teologica di Sicilia “San Giovanni Evangelista”* (FaTeSi), Patrizia Mazzola, teacher and trainer in high schools, Rita Kongo Mboshu, professor of Spiritual Theology at PUU, Cristina Montoya, professor of Communication at the *Istituto Universitario Sophia* (IUS) of Incisa and Figline Valdarno (Florence) and Marta Séide, professor of Theology of Education at PFSEA.

Also graduate and doctoral students collaborated with us from the Department of Religious Sciences, Pedagogy, Psychology and Sociology of different universities: Maria Mendes Barbosa, Maria Elena Caridi (PUU); Angela Bencivenga, Serena Cotic, Francesca Fratarcangeli, Ester Frigerio, Lory Pires Soares (PFSEA); Pietro Ciribifera, Simone Filomena, Pietro Passi, Giovanni Rosa (UPS); Federico Barbaro, Manuele Molinari, Francesca Romagnano, Daniele Sollo (Sapienza University of Rome) and Ilaria Troncacci (trainer and educator).

Given the wide variety of origin, age, and disciplinary background, it was important that the entire research group underwent a formative experience, self-training as well as shared preparation, both before and during the launch phases of the project in the country. In the team building and preparation phase we took the following things into account: a) coming from different academic and religious backgrounds; (b) possessing varying levels of disciplinary competence and professional experience; (c) being different ages and having varying degrees of experience in research in the field. At the same time all of us, in some way, were both inside or outside the world with which we were going to encounter, and this allowed us to keep a useful degree of proximity or distance in the field work. In concrete terms, we had tested with and on ourselves the tools envisaged for the first part of our action-research, that to be carried out using a qualitative methodology. We had, in fact, already simulated the focus groups and the grid of items, which were then to be used on groups of university professors or students, or members of the ICL training groups.

Therefore, we analysed the simulation we had experienced and shared our reflections, thoughts and evaluations, which subsequently aided the transfer of content to methodology and animation, from the gathering and recording of information to improving the instruments we adopted. In fact, we began to see how, also in ourselves, certain processes or subject content came to be perceived, understood and elaborated, where the key links lay and which roads we would need to take to make reality emerge in the most honest and plausible way¹⁷. This work served to establish and formulate a common language and to share the methodology of the action-research project. It also had an interesting first spin off in the formation of around 25 people for the field research on the theme of interculturality.

This was then made use of by the smaller directive group both for the qualitative analysis of the results of the focus groups and the construction of the structured questionnaire, translated into a number of languages, and the quantitative analysis of the data which was carried out, under the supervision and with the collaboration of several external experts. The people who worked with us were Fiorenza Deriu, associate professor of General Sociology in the Department of Statistical Science, Sapienza University of Rome, Luca Di Censi, Sociologist, Scientific Advisor with the Human Foundation of Rome and collaborator with the Sapienza University of Rome, and Nina Deliu, assistant professor at Sapienza University of Rome and researcher with the Department of Biostatistics at the University of Cambridge (UK). This report makes use of their analysis and their precious contribution to the interpretation of the data which was produced.

5

Theoretical framework and conceptual principles

This research is part of a study of cultural processes and by its very nature is both inter and trans-disciplinary. For this reason, the relevant theoretical constructs and the methodologies adopted are multi-faceted and interconnected, and so it is difficult to include them all, here, in any exhaustive way. Having said this, the theoretical framework, on the one side, is directly concerned with cultural anthropology, which is directed at understanding the relationship between verbal forms, repeated utterances, and concrete practices of socialization and cultural reproduction. The ques-

tions posed are what happens, what changes in our operational mode, in certain educational contexts (taking into account the place of cultural transmission and the learning process, the reproduction of forms, meaning, behavioural models and social paradigms), when the context is characterized by cultural plurality of its members and when this plurality is often described discursively in a “rhetorical” way.

Also *Sociological Survey* and *Critical Discourse Analysis* are useful for the project, directed towards the measurement of recurrent “key words” and the communities which produce them: what can emerge from this is the social interaction that is perceived and the meanings that are shared. This can be arrived at in the form of a “quantitative” evaluation, directed at an interpretation of cultural processes without the need for excessive generalizability in the construct: the idea is to use a sampling procedure, multi-layered and purposive, for the measurement of linguistic co-occurrence, lexical patterning, key words and their predominant semantic domains and contexts. For this, transcriptions of the dialogues taking place in the focus groups and the guided interviews are compared with the data gathered from an analysis of the results from the circulation online of a structured questionnaire, using, for the most part, the same items as those used in the focus groups. Then, starting from a knowledge of the interpretative frameworks of intercultural pedagogy, we attempted to identify the conceptual understanding and existence (or absence) of practices in the siting and promotion of intercultural competences: these are intended to mean dynamic competences, processual and multidimensional, the result of a continuous and never-ending learning path. We intended to identify the contexts, itineraries and strategies implemented to promote their growth.

The research is anchored to the defined meanings of three principal concepts, plus one transversal concept important for social understanding and practice. We start with the question of a) *multiculturalism* and b) *interculturality*, the significance of each term and their inter-relationship. In addition, the notion of competences, or rather *intercultural competences* requires definition in order to detect their perception, understanding and diffusion. The concepts are defined and explored here not in isolation but in their interconnectivity and for their related implications in the sharing of learning and life experiences in an educational context marked by internationalization, diversity of cultural background and the possible development of intercultural competences. As well as clarifying the meaning of these three terms, in this section we also look at a fourth one which is currently being much used in the university context, *internationalization*.

The term *multiculturalism* is used here to refer to that social and cultural phenomenon which is realized when there is a stable, and in some way interactive (with or without tensions) co-presence of people coming from different social and cultural backgrounds. The forms of multiculturalism (and models of *multiculturalism*), vary according to the possible interaction forecasted, promoted and received: these may go from separatist division, with few and well-defined interactions, to wider forms, marked by tolerance, exchange and life-work experiences in common. However, the horizon for multiculturalism (given that it is tolerant, welcoming and taken on as a project) still remains a form of reciprocal, cordial but essentially weak exchange unless there is a meeting between the protagonists involved which leads to major, content transformations (in cultural traditions, habits and customs, ways of thinking and behaving): a possible and diversified experience of cohabitation and cooperation¹⁸.

However, in contexts of rising multiculturalism, *interculturality* is a different phenomenon. It is realized with varying degrees of intensity and through long, complex processes, and involves not only acceptance and respect for the other person, in peaceful and tolerant cohabitation, but an exchange and a readiness to undergo reciprocal transformation. It constitutes a substantial, slow modification of some aspects of the presuppositions underlying our own cultural identity, perceived not in static, formal terms, but through processes of exchange, hospitality and inclusion of

the culture of the other, processes which lead to an unexperienced merger and *syncretism*. Interculturality is perceived, here, not only as a horizon to construct but also as an awareness of the phenomena which lead to and filter down to the reconstruction of the presuppositions and assumptions underlying one's own "identity and cultural diversity". Interculturality is seen not to be the realization of an additional, in any case *syncretic*, static phenomenon, the production of a *third*, hybrid culture. Rather, it is envisaged in a dynamic and participatory mode, in a daily search for dialogue, reception, acceptance, understanding and the overcoming of conflict: collaboration and construction of a common and plural future. The future is conceived of as a reciprocal enrichment and a dynamic reciprocal transformation¹⁹.

The creation of interculturality requires a conscious and progressive development of *intercultural competences*, namely an "interrelated whole", conceived of as a "system" of abilities, both specific (intercultural in the strict sense) as well as general and transversal ones (basic communicative and relational), which two or more people implement in interaction and reciprocal exchange in multicultural contexts. These competences can, then, be seen as a structured "system", interconnected and dynamic, consisting of proven abilities to use, in learning situations, at work, in life, and in contact with people (and/or groups) who are conveyors of diverse cultural, linguistic, value-based knowledge, skills and internal orientations (dispositions, values). These abilities allow people to interact in an efficacious and appropriate way with *other* people who are, themselves, conveyors of cultural, linguistic and semantic worlds which are different from theirs²⁰. They are the capacities to manage prejudices, to interpret and understand different cultural traditions, and discover a shared horizon. Someone who has developed these intercultural competences manages to activate, integrate, coordinate and make function their own internal resources, cognitive, affective-relational, motivational and volitional, namely a sum of knowledge and consolidated abilities and other internal, stable dispositions, (such as interest in others, readiness to dialogue). This goes together with the utilization of external resources in a coherent and fruitful fashion²¹. Intercultural competences can be developed over time in different learning contexts, formal and informal. Also new learning paths might be required of them in changing contexts²².

In the context of higher education, we are witnessing an increasing use of the term "internationalization", which assumes different meanings according to the author concerned. In this work we have adopted the following definition: internationalization is an intentional process which consists in the integration of an international, intercultural and global dimension, and, in the rationale and provision of post-secondary education, has the aim of raising the quality of instruction and research for all students and teaching staff, and attributing a significant contribution to society²³. This term does not figure in the empirical evaluation in this research but it is still analysed transversally, especially in the description of the university contexts.

6

The research questions and general objectives

As outlined previously, the action research is motivated by the desire to investigate why, in the face of widespread multiculturalism, understood as the co-presence of people with linguistic, cultural and national differences, this is not reflected in many catholic, ecclesiastical learning environments. There would seem to be a lack of a planning and operational dimension to considerations of intercultural dynamics, thought of as competent and profitable interaction, exchange, influence and reciprocal transformation. The group of teachers, researchers and trainers who started the project were already familiar with the contexts under review (that is to say the ICL formative communities and ecclesiastical universities) because in various ways they were part of them. From their own experience they knew that, in the various educa-

tional environments, multiculturalism was a question of fact, but they were also aware that the situations could be experienced and managed differently.

The problematics of the research *locus* emerge from the fact that two realities are perceived which are in some way contradictory: on the one side a) extensive multiculturalism among students and teachers, trainers and trainees, and on the other side b) much theoretical and speculative attention to the subject in the form of thematic focussing and public discussion, but little actual intercultural transformative practice. The aim of the action research was to understand how this state of affairs had happened and why. We wanted to create a way (through the use of a structured, purposive sample) for the recognition and explanation of what was blocking this mechanism: extending from the experience and awareness of reality (multicultural), with its resources or problematics, to a consideration of the competences and operational transformations of the same situation (towards a more interactive form of multiculturalism or towards a more mature experience of interculturality).

On the one side, multiculturalism, a general historical fact in catholic ecclesiastical institutions, with members from every part of the world, has been, for some time now, experimented with in new and specific ways in the training context. This is particularly true in the ICL, with their international spread. Due to a decline in the number of people desiring to join, and consequently a reduction in the training population, there has been an increasing preference to conduct training houses with consecrated men and women from diverse provenance. Instead, the Roman and Italian ecclesiastical academic institutions have been experimenting with internationalization for decades. Anyway, after having trained students coming from all parts of the catholic world, also thanks to the increasing internationalization and mobility of the ICL members, today, as well as the usual internationalization of many students, we are witnessing plurality of origin in many teaching staff. Another important contextual factor for our Action Research is that, even though Italy and Europe have historically been the sites of the founding of many ICL, these are continuously being less chosen as first or second formative places, preferring, instead, contexts in different continents²⁴. At the same time, the existence of many university institutes (especially in Rome) still attracts many people from all over the world, who find congregational and inter-congregational education in Italy, and where they can combine formation for the Consecrated Life with academic education. So we can say that the ecclesiastical universities, today, are still characterized by a high level of internationalization, but anyway no less than in ICL formative places present in Italy. And we should remember that the members of the latter are made up of a good part of the students of the former. Moreover, this plurality is more pronounced than several decades ago in the original provenance of trainers, educators and teachers. But what has happened to this widespread multiculturalism?

For the research project we have tried to model three different situations, in order of the multiculturalism we perceive to be significant in our realities. These can be summed up as follows:

- a) Multiculturalism is *not addressed* as a question. It is perceived only as background (enriching and/or problematic, and is denied in both the content and practice of learning.
- b) Multiculturalism is *the subject of much discourse, moments of representation and recognition of diversity, but rare in transformative practices* in the content and practice of learning.
- c) Multiculturalism is *the occasion of a slow, complex but enriching process of exchange, of interaction and transformative intercultural dynamics*, directed to both the content and practices of learning.

When applied to the management of multiculturalism in the educational institutions under review, the three scenarios indicated above can be described in more detail as follows:

a) The first scenario (with three variations)

Multiculturality is *not* addressed as a question. It is perceived only as background (enriching and/or problematic, and is denied in both the content and practice of learning

1. A *universalist* vision predominates: multicultural/cultural diversity is not taken into consideration or is denied. In brief: “*There is no need to oversee it because basically we are all the same ...*” Some indicators of this scenario which we could meet in the formative communities are, for example, the exclusive use of the Italian language (or of only one language), the lack of alternative offers which take into account traditions, content and approaches which are different from Eurocentred ones, and which favour interaction.
2. An *assimilationist* vision prevails: multicultural/cultural diversity must be integrated through a progressive adjustment of the different subject to the dominant context. In short: “*They must become us*”. The following indicators can be detected: widespread evidence of diversity considered as a problem, action and training offers designed to encourage people to integrate/assimilate and to acquire the language, habits, customs, subject content and didactic approaches of the host country. The communicated message (often implicit) is this: “*We are in Italy, here we do it like this, you must adapt, we will help you to do it ...*”. Even when there is guidance directed at the question of conflict or problematics, this is lived only in a psycho-social, inter-relational, ethical-religious key, and never as a part of the cultural dynamics of alternative interpretations of existence and relationships.
3. There is evident discomfort and inability to face multicultural/cultural diversity because it is too problematic. In short: “*We don't know how to deal with it, therefore we won't*”. The following indicators can be detected: widespread evidence of diversity seen as a problem and consequently no policy or offers directed at giving an answer to it.

The third variation, tends to change into the second one, particularly in the smaller contexts, and those with fewer resources.

b) The second scenario

Multiculturality is *the subject of much discourse, moments of representation and recognition of diversity, but rare in transformative practices in the content and practice of learning.*

4. Here there is a *relativist/separatist* vision: multicultural/cultural diversity is recognized but managed in a way that deals with the surface of relationships and the educational context. The co-presence and/or cohabitation among people with diverse cultural backgrounds is considered an opportunity for a possible enrichment, but only in terms of reciprocal knowledge and the chance for “occasional” or “marginal” recognition. The following indicators will be: limited use of more than one language and only for specific activities, the sporadic existence of reciprocal practices of presentation and knowledge (“Populations Day”), meetings with presentations of traditions and local customs, occasional use of the forms, artefacts, songs, and food belonging to different national or ethnic traditions. Also in this case when there is guidance directed at tackling conflict or problematics, this is predominantly experienced in a psycho-social, inter-relational, ethical-religious key, and rarely as a part of the cultural dynamics of alternative interpretations of existence and relationships.

Besides, as mentioned previously, even if the multicultural and intercultural question is treated in several moments of assembly or training as a theme and a subject for investigation and study, this is not transferred into systematic practice nor into the transformation of the models and content of formation. It is underpinned

by an objectivised and static idea of culture and cultural identity. We define this as multiculturalism in which exchange remains weak and superficial: there is tolerance, respect, curiosity, dialogue, but this happens intermittently, and not in a performative sense, either. This vision gives room for weak forms of interaction: *“Diversity is fine, but everyone lives in their own way and lets others live in their own way ... It’s important to give space to everyone but we need to find a prevailing and functional modality of interaction where diversity takes second place ... Every one of us has their own cultural identity and it’s only fair to respect other people’s, without losing one’s own...”*. There is acceptance, adjustment, occasional adoption of different habits but without any significant change, and only with regard to non-structural questions: there is work done on linguistic translation, but not on the attention to diversity of content and paradigms. There is the tendency to place only very general folkloristic and traditional aspects at the centre, without considering the complexity, the multiplicity of factors which come into play in the preceding and current global and local contacts of each person. We can cite some basic competences which are in place and which demonstrate a certain degree of exchange, even if they are weak: the awareness of one’s own and others’ diversity, acceptance, respect, tolerance for diversity, the predisposition to acquire knowledge about ethno-folkloristic traditions of cultures other than one’s own.

c) The third scenario

Multiculturalism is the occasion of a slow, complex but enriching process of exchange, of interaction and transformative intercultural dynamics, directed to both the content and practices of learning.

5. Co-presence and cohabitation are managed with awareness and purpose, activating processes of exchange, knowledge and reciprocal transformation, together with guidance in creating common meanings in an intercultural horizon. From the indicators we can detect: stable practices of exchange, enrichment and personal and institutional transformation in a cultural key. There are systematized paths of intercultural education and the development of intercultural competences, not only episodic ones. What emerges in these qualified trainers and trainees are specific intercultural competences, that is to say knowledge, ability and integral predispositions (behaviours, values) which allow them to interact in an efficacious and appropriate way with people who are the conveyors of cultural, linguistic and semantic worlds different from their own: the capacity to deal with prejudices, to listen, to culturally decentralize, to be empathetic, to critically interpret their own and others’ cultures, to understand the other, and to find together shared meanings and paths. In this academic reality there is space for languages, educational content, and a pluralistic didactic methodology in response to cultural diversity and the promotion of occasions of exchange: in the content and methodology of the formation, evaluation, selection and interaction with the teaching staff, experience and intercultural competences were verified, assessed and given credit to.

In the ICL we see an extended, hybrid interculturalism, in the sense that it involves a reinterpretation of the attraction to, knowledge of and dialogue with diverse spiritual, theological and sociocultural paradigms in the structural redefinition of the community organization; in the formation path the dimension of the evaluation and the promotion of intercultural competences is central.

The research therefore investigates *“if and in what way”* the experience of training together in an educational and learning community (at university and/or in the community of the Consecrated Life), characterized by the multiculturalism of its members, is able to give value to and promote the meeting and exchange among people with

different cultural backgrounds: if, and in what way, it enriches and transforms learning content and processes, enables the construction of intercultural experience and the development of intercultural competences. Or, rather, if all this doesn't happen, why not.

7

The specific objectives of the research project

In connection with the research questions and general objectives, we have tried to analyse, operationalize and distinguish specific objectives which will enable us to reassemble and construct a general framework. These are indicated in the form of the following questions:

- Which of the three scenarios described above is predominant in the sample communities involved?
- What are the perceptions of the participants in the research from the learning communities?
- What kind of interaction is in place in the academic communities and the Consecrated Life characterized by multiculturalism?
- How are intercultural competences, essential for life in multicultural contexts, perceived, experienced and promoted?
- What actions at an institutional level have been activated to promote the development of these competences?
- What are the prospects for a future intercultural transformation of various present realities?
- Finally, thinking about the three scenarios, what kind of transformation would lead to the dominance of one scenario over another?

The specific objectives of the research correspond to a series of interdependent intentions aimed at:

- a) revealing and describing the dynamics at work in the learning contexts characterized by multiculturalism, that is to say to analyse and understand the type of interaction in place in the contexts of universities and the communities of the Consecrated Life (at the individual and institutional level with regard to processes and actions, active or absent);
- b) exploring the intercultural competences which are useful for interaction in multicultural contexts, which ones are they and how are they experienced, understood and promoted, identifying those which are already present and in action, and those which need to be activated and strengthened;
- c) putting into place educational itineraries to promote the awareness of the need to identify and acquire a sum of intercultural competences through targeted and systematic formation, to be utilized in study and learning contexts, ordinary life, and life/mission.

Inherent to the general and specific objectives described above, the total coordinated activity of the described project also contained several indirect objectives, namely some results to be expected at the end of its execution. We list four here. The first two have been fully achieved.

- ISCSM, together with the partners of the Project, held an International Congress at PUU in November 2021 on the theme of the survey, with national and international collaboration.
- Edited by ISCSM, a scientific volume was published containing the results of the research-action-training project and the contributions presented at the International Congress.

The following two have produced some first results, but those of the entire research path will be monitored for the effects which will happen in the long term.

- The PUU (ISCSM), the PFSEA, the ITVCC of the *Pontificia Università Lateranense* (PUL) of Rome and the IUS of Loppiano have experienced a collaboration which opens up future research in which also other research centres or university institutions can be involved.
- Once the action-research-training project was concluded, several university communities and formative communities belonging to a number of ICL started pilot research projects or action and education on intercultural transformation in the different institutions, and/or formative paths to constitute and promote intercultural competences among trainers and trainees in their communities.

The project also has other specific objectives, namely the expected results in the action-research-training perspective, thought of as a participatory dynamic of transformation of the realities involved. On the training horizon, after the culmination of the experience and the sharing of the results, it is to be hoped that the participants recognize and value cultural diversity as a formative opportunity related to the development of intercultural competences. As “expected results” (action anticipated for the future) these can be described according to the three types of participant in the project.

Members of a multicultural community (academic or consecrated life training)

- They are aware that multiculturalism is a resource and they tend to realize interculturalism not only by accepting and respecting difference, in peaceful and tolerant cohabitation, but through reciprocal exchange and transformation;
- They are predisposed to activate processes of inter-exchange, hospitality, inclusion into the culture of the other in the perspective of a reciprocal dynamic of enrichment and transformation;
- They recognize that cohabitation involves a substantial and slow modification of some aspects of one’s own cultural identity assumptions;
- They experiment with a daily search for dialogue, for acceptance, for the overcoming of prejudices and conflicts, for understanding and collaboration;
- They perceive that cultural plurality concerns and proposes processes of change also in content and methods.

Formative Institutes (academic and ICL communities)

- They recognize and value multiculturalism in the institutional choices and actions which particularly concern internationalization, plurality, the contextualization of courses offered and curricula, reflecting the international composition of both teaching staff and trainers;
- They promote inter-exchange between people and groups of different provenance through formal and informal activities, and by creating the conditions for this to happen (space, time, instruments, itineraries).

Teachers and educators

- They are aware that cultural plurality concerns and proposes processes of change also in educational content, methods and learning paths;
- They activate laboratories, research roads and study paths with a view to possible institutional transformation.

8

The population, sample and stages of the research

The reference population is constituted by the ecclesiastical academic institutions, the training communities of the Institutes of the Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life (ICL), present in Italy and characterized by a high level of multiculturalism among teachers and students. Hence, **two reference populations** were identified:

A. The ecclesiastical academic institutions with two units of analysis:

- A1) University teachers (clergy, consecrated men and women, lay people),
- A2) University students (clergy, consecrated men and women, lay people).

B. The female and male ICL formative communities (juniors, novices, students, inter-congregational formative communities, permanent teachers, etc.) with two units of analysis:

- B1) Educators and community directors.
- B2) Members of the formative community.

As it was not possible or opportune to use a random sample, given the objectives of the research, in order to define the sample with which to work, we implemented a purposive procedure and a multi-stage sampling strategy which was in line with our aims²⁵:

- In the first stage three distinct geographical areas were selected in the North, Centre and South of Italy.
- In the second stage a selection was made from the three sample zones derived from the first stage, with particular concentration in the Roman context, where there is a concentration of a higher number of multicultural ecclesiastical academic institutions and training communities of the Institutes of the Consecrated Life: a number of academic communities and a number of religious communities, balancing the sample between male and female religious communities.
- In the third stage all the people in training were included, the consecrated men and women, the priests, and the lay people belonging to the ecclesiastical academic institutions and the formative communities of the Institutes of the Consecrated Life selected in the previous stage (with the exclusion of teachers and educators)²⁶.

The surveyed sample comprises 20 male and female formative ICL communities²⁷ and 15 ecclesiastical Institutions of higher education²⁸. In order to arrive at this result, as Luca di Censi points out, "at each stage, we proceeded with a selection of the (aggregated) units based on criteria that from time to time resulted to be the most adequate and feasible (purposive sampling)²⁹. The adopted form of sampling responds to the need for typological representativeness, considerate of its objective (i.e., assessing the relationships between variables), and allows to compare groups (i.e., social types) of equivalent sample sizes. These are identified through a combined reference to variables considered important, and independently on their numerical representativeness within the general population"³⁰. Despite the adoption of a rigorous procedure, in any case the sampling, as often happens in Action Research, is not random, and the generalizability to the whole population is very limited³¹.

The investigation is designed in two phases, a qualitative and a quantitative one. The first brings to the fore the *qualitative survey* instrument, namely the focus group (FG), using an interview and two other survey instruments, one for the identification/selection of the intercultural competences considered important, and the other consisting of a form for the narration of 'critical incidents'. The survey instruments were constructed *ad hoc* to be used for the research objective and also, at the same time, in formation.

The focus groups were held from the end of September 2018 to the end of January 2020, involving 288 participants from 6 University Institutions and 7 training communities of the Consecrated Life, of which 2 were female and 4 were male, and one mixed. The selection of the groups was made with care to involve situations distributed throughout Italy; even though the majority of the groups were from Rome and its hinterland, there were other groups in the North, Centre and South of Italy. The sample

was enlarged by several groups of ICL members who had met up with the researchers during formative events and conferences (274 people). These were asked to compile the form on intercultural competences, one of the tools used by the participants of the third focus group. The number of forms completed in this phase was 155.

Finally, still in the qualitative phase, it was proposed to the third focus group to write down a story about a 'critical incident', to be carried out under the guidance of a tutor. This involved a total of 75 participants. 23 people from the group selected for the focus groups aligned to the task, but only 6 members of this group completed it (various reasons can be attributed to this but the principal one was that the activity took place *online* from February to May 2020 in the period of very strict restrictions imposed by Covid-19, which had hit Italy). The remaining 69 were lay and consecrated women university students and one consecrated man from PFSEA who were involved in this activity in a period between 2018 and 2020.

In the quantitative research phase, the multilingual Questionnaire was compiled by 535 people. It was filled in online, with free access, from the beginning of March 2021 to the end of June 2021.

Tab. 1 – Number of participants relative to the instruments utilized³²

| Instrument used | Total no. of participants | % by gender | | % by civil status | |
|--|----------------------------|-------------|------|---------------------------|-----|
| | | female | male | consecrated men and women | lay |
| Focus group | 298 | 47% | 53% | / | / |
| Interview | 8 | 29% | 71% | 100% | / |
| Activity Sheet: <i>The competences that are useful in multicultural training contexts</i> | 429* (of whom 155 from FG) | 72% | 28% | / | / |
| Narration of 'critical incidents' | 75* (of whom 6 from FG) | 99% | 1% | 57% | 43% |
| Online Questionnaire | 535* | 72% | 28% | 82% | 8% |
| Total | 1.342* | / | / | / | / |

As we have seen, the research population consisted of two units of analysis (a. the academic communities and b. the ICL formative communities) from which a sample was selected for the qualitative phase and there was free participation in the quantitative phase.

8.1 The ecclesiastical academic communities

As far as the academic communities are concerned, namely universities, faculties and other ecclesiastical institutions of higher education, the population is large and is distributed throughout Italy, even though the grand majority is concentrated in the city of Rome³³. For this reason, Rome is particularly represented in the sample for the high level of diversity and multiculturalism of the people involved. Then we have included three smaller situations, one from the North, one from the Centre and one from the south of Italy, in order to widen the typological representativeness of the sample and to have comparative elements to ascertain homogeneity or divergence. The selection of the academic institutions was based on proximity to the research team or their willingness to participate at the moment of contact and recruitment.

In the qualitative phase, the following were involved in the project (first semester 2018 – first semester 2020): the PUU, the ITVCC of the PUL, the PFSEA of Rome; then, the STI-PIME based in Monza (Milan); the FaTeSi based in Palermo; and finally, the IUS based in Figline and Incisa Valdarno (Florence).

Tab. 2 – Summary of the ecclesiastical academic institutions contacted by the directive team for the qualitative phase (for the period going from the first semester of 2018 to the first semester of 2020)

| Academic institutions contacted for the <i>qualitative</i> phase |
|--|
| Pontificia Università Urbaniana (Rome) |
| Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium (Rome) |
| Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata Claretianum (Rome) |
| Istituto Universitario Sophia (Figline and Incisa Valdarno, Florence) |
| Seminario Teologico Internazionale – PIME (Monza, Milan) |
| Pontificia Facoltà Teologica di Sicilia San Giovanni Evangelista (Palermo) |

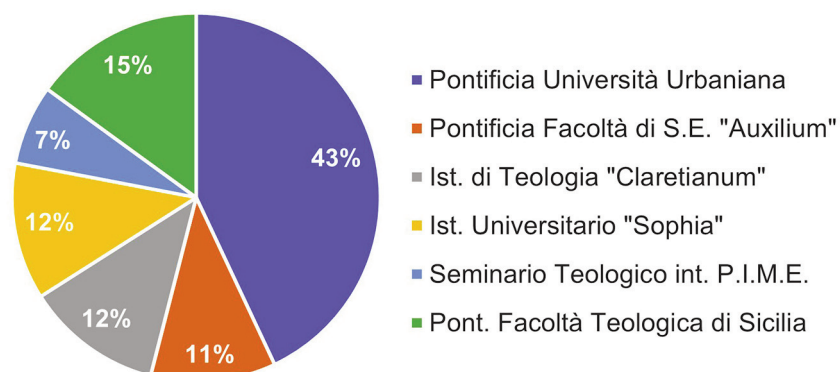
There were 17 groups interviewed from the academic institutions belonging to the project (9 with students, and 8 with teachers) and there were 38 meetings or focus groups (26 with students and 12 with teachers) with the total participation of 92 teachers and 98 students (Tab.3).

Tab. 3 – Number of *focus groups* and participants by ecclesiastical institution of higher education

| Participating academic institutions (6) | No. of groups (No. of meetings) | | No. of participants | | |
|--|------------------------------------|----------|---------------------|----------|------|
| | Teachers | Students | Teachers | Students | Tot. |
| Pontificia Università Urbaniana (Rome) | 1(2) 2(1) | 5(3) | 35 | 46 | 81 |
| Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium (Rome) | 1(2) | 1(3) | 10 | 12 | 22 |
| Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata Claretianum (Rome) | 1(2) | 1(3) | 11 | 12 | 23 |
| Istituto Universitario Sophia (Figline and Incisa Valdarno, Florence) | 1(2) | 1(3) | 8 | 14 | 22 |
| Seminario Teologico Internazionale – PIME (Monza, Milan) | 1(1) | / | 14 | / | 14 |
| Pontificia Facoltà Teologica di Sicilia San Giovanni Evangelista (Palermo) | 1(1) | 1(2) | 14 | 14 | 28 |
| Total | 8(12) | 9(26) | 92 | 98 | |
| | 17(38) | | 190 | | |

The total number of members of the academic communities who participated in the focus groups is 190, of whom 43% belong to the PUU and the rest are equally distributed among the Institutions adhering to the project. (Graph. 1).

Graph. 1 – Distribution percentage of participants in *focus groups* by academic institution



In the second, quantitative, phase (second semester 2021, during the lockdown attendant on the Covid-19 pandemic), for the distribution of the multilingual structured Questionnaire, other academic institutions were contacted but only the UPS, the Pontificia Facoltà Teologica Marianum and the Pontificia Facoltà Teologica Seraphicum, all in Rome, expressed their willingness to collaborate and give news of the survey to their students (Tab. 4).

Tab. 4 – Summary of the ecclesiastical academic institutions contacted by the research team for the quantitative phase (second semester 2021)

| Academic institutions contacted for <i>quantitative phase</i> |
|---|
| Pontificia Università Urbaniana (Rome) |
| Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium (Rome) |
| Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata Claretianum (Rome) |
| Istituto Universitario Sophia (Figline and Incisa Valdarno, Florence) |
| Seminario Teologico Internazionale – PIME (Monza, Milan) |
| Pontificia Facoltà Teologica di Sicilia “San Giovanni” (Palermo) |
| Università Pontificia Salesiana (Rome) |
| Pontificia Facoltà Teologica Seraphicum (Rome) |
| Pontificia Facoltà Teologica Marianum (Rome) |
| Pontificia Facoltà Teologica Teresianum (Rome)* |

* *It did not adhere to the quantitative analysis phase*

An email consisting of a brief presentation of the project was sent to the Secretary Offices of each university, asking for their willingness to distribute to students a link to the Questionnaire, via their institutional mailing lists, requesting all to participate and compile it online, anonymously. In total, on the basis of the adhesion achieved and the feedback received, around 3,000 students replied. Anyway in this period, repeated lockdowns due to Covid-19, following only brief moments of being open, prohibited didactic activity in person at university, which made it more difficult to sensitize students about the compilation of the online Questionnaire. Table 5 shows a summary of the distribution percentage of the number of Questionnaire compiled per Institution (out of 469).

Tab. 5 – Distribution percentage of participants in Questionnaire by ecclesiastical academic institution*

| Participating academic institutions | Percentage |
|---|---------------|
| Pontificia Università Urbaniana (Rome) | 38.4% |
| Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium (Rome) | 25.6% |
| Istituto Universitario Sophia (Figline and Incisa Valdarno, Florence) | 6.0% |
| Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata Claretianum (Rome) | 5.8% |
| Università Pontificia Salesiana (Rome) | 5.1% |
| Seminario Teologico Internazionale – PIME (Monza, Milan) | 3.4% |
| Other academic institutions | 15.7% |
| Total | 100.0% |

* *Only those Institutions with a percentage over 3% are listed*

The section of the questionnaire directed to those who follow university received 468 answers, mostly from females (70.4%). The students' answers come from more than 15 Universities, Faculties or ecclesiastical university Institutes, the majority of which were gathered from the sites of Rome³⁴.

8.2 The ICL formative communities

As regards the ICL formative communities marked by multiculturalism, the list of sites in Italy was created consulting the national and international bodies of the ICL: the UISG ("International Union of Superiors General"), the USG ("Union of Superiors General"), the USMI ("Unione Superiore Maggiori d'Italia") and the CISM ("Conferenza Italiana Superiori Maggiori")³⁵.

In the *qualitative* phase of the Action Research a number of formative communities were identified with a view to guaranteeing representativeness between the North, Centre and South of Italy, and between the male and female population. On the basis of the lists and notifications we obtained, the contact was then made in personal form, proposing the online compilation of the Questionnaire to more than 20 formative communities, of which only 7 replied in a positive way (4 male communities, 2 female communities, and 1 from a course including both).

Tab. 6 – Number of ICL formative communities and groups by gender (qualitative phase)

| ICL formative Communities (7) | ICL Communities | |
|--|--------------------|----------|
| | Female (2) | Male (5) |
| Seminario Teologico Internazionale dei padri della Consolata (Rome) | | 1 |
| Casa di formazione Noviziato dei padri Comboniani (Naples) | | 1 |
| Seminario Teologico Internazionale del PIME (Monza, Milan) | | 1 |
| Casa di Formazione Oblati Maria Immacolata (Vermicino, Rome) | | 1 |
| Casa Inter-congregazionale di Propaganda Fide "Mater Ecclesiae – Foyer Paolo VI" (Castel Gandolfo, Rome) | 1 | |
| Comunità "Madre Ersilia Canta" dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (Rome) | 1 | |
| Corso sul Carisma della famiglia Paolina (Rome) | 1 (mixed group) | |
| Total | | 7 |

There were 9 groups involved in the focus groups for the 7 formative communities (5 in the male communities, 3 in the female communities and 1 in the mixed group). In total there were 27 meetings (9 with consecrated women, 15 with consecrated men or seminarists and 3 with the mixed group) with a total participation of 108 members, of whom 44% were female and 56% were male.

Besides, as mentioned previously, one of the activities in the third meeting of the focus group involved the compilation of the form *The Competences that are useful in multicultural training contexts*³⁶: this was administered also to several groups of consecrated men and women who the researchers

Luca Pandolfi, Mariolina Cattaneo and Enrica Ottone had already met at conferences or formation courses³⁷. In total, the number of people who were contacted to complete this activity, for the most part consecrated men and women, numbered 429, of whom 155 (67 lay students and 88 consecrated men and women) are among the 167 who participated in the third encounter of the focus groups. So, another 274 were added to do this activity, including consecrated men and women.

Tab. 7 – Number of focus groups and ICL community participants (qualitative phase)

| ICL formative Communities (7) | No. of groups (No. of meetings) | | No. of participants | |
|--|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| | Consecrated (female) | Consecrated (male) | Consecrated (female) | Consecrated (male) |
| Seminario Teologico Internazionale dei padri della Consolata (Rome) | | 1(3) | | 11 |
| Casa di Formazione Noviziato dei padri Comboniani (Naples) | | 1(3) | | 14 |
| Seminario Teologico Internazionale del PIME (Monza, Milan) | | 2(3) | | 22 |
| Casa di Formazione degli Oblati Maria Immacolata (Vermicino, RM) | | 1(3) | | 13 |
| Casa Inter-congregazionale di Propaganda Fide "Mater Ecclesiae – Foyer Paolo VI" (Castel Gandolfo, Rome) | 2(3) | | 25 | |
| Comunità "Madre Ersilia Canta" dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (Rome) | 1(3) | | 14 | |
| Corso sul Carisma della famiglia Paolina (Rome) | 1(3) (mixed group) | | 8 | 1 |
| Total | 3(9) | 5(15) | 47 | 61 |
| | 9(27) | | 108 | |

In the quantitative phase (March-June 2021), during the administration online of the Questionnaire, the heads and the leaders of the formation in the 615 ICL present in Italy were contacted: through the Secretary of "USMI Nazionale", 409 Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and, through the Secretary of "CISM Nazionale", 206 male ones. Each Institute was reached by an email containing a brief presentation of the project, a request for information about the possible existence of a learning community in Italy characterized by a certain plurality of nationality of its members, and an invitation to circulate the Questionnaire to the members of their community asking them to participate anonymously, compiling it online. The invitation was sent twice to each ICL, in the months of March and April 2021. Of the 206 male ICL none replied.

When contacted directly, the male ICL who had participated at focus groups (from now on FG), where only some of the community were part of FG, replied positively to the distribution of the Questionnaire, but we don't have an exact number of their members in the period of its administration online (March-June 2021). The places of reference are: "Casa di formazione degli Oblati Maria Immacolata" of Vermicino (Rome), STI-PIME and "Casa di Formazione del Noviziato dei padri Comboniani", of Napoli. Apart from the last, the first three had already been reached through the communication with University Institutions, all of these participating as students.

Of the 409 female institutes contacted, 20 replied: 9 stated that their Institutions did not meet the criteria of the research (due to absence of a formative community, or the existence of a mono-national community membership, or formative communities based outside Italy), 11 gave their consent to distribute the Questionnaire within 13 communities of people in formation. Another 2 ICL, having got to hear about the research, expressed their willingness to distribute the Questionnaire³⁸.

It is not possible to establish the number of questionnaires compiled from the congregations involved because information about ICL provenance has not been collected for reasons of respect for privacy.

Tab. 8 – Number of Congregations and members reached (quantitative phase)

| Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (13) | No. formative communities | No. members |
|---|---------------------------|--|
| Apostole del Sacro Cuore di Gesù | 1 | 9 juniors |
| Dimesse Figlie di Maria Immacolata | 1 | 3 |
| Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice | 2 | 24 novices |
| Figlie del Sacro Cuore di Gesù S. Teresa Verzeri | 1 | 4 |
| Figlie di S. Maria della Provvidenza (Don Guanella) | 1 | 34 consecrated women (of whom 26 sisters, 7 juniors, 1 novice) |
| Francescane Missionarie del Sacro Cuore | 1 | 10 juniors |
| Francescane Missionarie di Gesù Bambino | 2 | 24 |
| Mantellate Serve di Maria | 1 | 3 |
| Sorelle della Misericordia (Verona) | 1 | 4 |
| Sorelle Ministre della Carità (Trecate, Novara) | 1 | 4 |
| Suore Operaie della S. Casa di Nazareth | 2 | 8 postulants 11 novices |
| Missionarie di San Carlo Borromeo | 1 | 10 |
| Figlie della Carità di S. Giovanna Antida Thouret | / | / |
| Total | 15 | 148 |

9

Research methodology

From the outset of the project, given the complexity of the context, the reference population and the combination of research approaches – ethnographic, sociological and pedagogic – it was decided to adopt an exploratory approach: the idea was to use an investigative methodology which would be efficacious in bringing together a variety of learning situations and that would activate the interaction of educational processes in multicultural contexts on the part of those who activate and study these processes. The action-research approach³⁹, chosen by the team over other possible models, refers to Kurt Lewin’s original model, which is characterized by three principal elements: a) combining action and reflection, b) participatory research, c) directed to producing a change and an improvement⁴⁰. Participatory and learning dynamics were activated in various stages with the main aim of identifying, analysing and also improving a given situation through the involvement of each individual protagonist in a specific context, should this be the extended research team, the Institutions involved and the single members of the academic community and the ICL communities who adhered to the project.

The dynamics of investigation and self-analysis with a view to change were linked and consciously combined and monitored in order to activate knowledge, awareness and to incentivize evaluation, decision-making and action: it was expected we would see effects both during and after the participation in the project (effects which, however, we do not identify and document here). The entire project was intended to instigate a process oriented to the development and dissemination of knowledge and competences as well as to a specific *empowerment* for future action which could take place at both a personal and institutional level.

The action-research-training process unfolded in various phases: the building of the group, the training of its members, the creation and revision of the instruments to

be used and their application in the qualitative and quantitative phases, and finally, the analysis and presentation of results. All of this assumed educational value (even if in different ways and to different extents) for all the members in the sense that it had an impact on the system of group beliefs, knowledge and values, at the levels of the restricted team and the enlarged research team, and all those who participated in the focus groups, the interviews, and the Questionnaire.

In the months between March and September 2018 there were numerous extended team training meetings in preparation for the conducting of the focus groups, as has been described in the first part of this paper. No less, during the whole itinerary, meetings and work sessions both in person and online with the restricted team were taking place. The path was articulated in four main phases (1. constitution of the group, 2. design and preparation of the research, 3. participation and activation of the focus groups, the interviews and other activities, and the administration of the online Questionnaire) which basically followed the original procedural model of the action-research process proposed by Bart Cunningham (Tab. 9). In every phase monitoring and evaluation took place, achieved principally through participant observation and the collection of documentation during the various moments of verification and assessment⁴¹.

Tab. 9 – The phases in the action-research process

| Phases | Actions | Time frame |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Constructing the group | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reciprocal knowledge (motivation, interests, aims) among the members of the restricted and enlarged team. – Identification of common objectives and methodology. – Construction of the theoretical background and practice (training and self-training). – Intermediary evaluation. | Sep. 2017 Sep. 2018 June-Oct. 2019 |
| 2. Planning the project | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Definition of the general idea and the research focus. – Needs analysis (preparation of instruments, search, analysis of results). – Programming and organization of the action. – Intermediary evaluation. | Sep. 2017 |
| 3. Action Participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Activation of the <i>qualitative</i> survey (focus group, narration of critical incidents). – Activation of the <i>quantitative</i> survey (<i>Questionnaire online</i>) – Intermediary evaluation. | Sep. 2018 Jan. 2020 Mar.-June 2021 |
| * Monitoring and evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Preparation of the monitoring instruments – Description, analysis and presentation of results in International Conference – Preparation of the final <i>Report</i> – Final Evaluation | Sep. 2020 Feb. 2022 |

* *Monitoring and evaluation took place throughout all the phases.
The detailed timeline is reported in Tab.10.*

As indicated in Tab. 9, monitoring and evaluation took place in all the preceding phases: the process is cyclical, so allowing the passage or return to another phase, and open to another research development, to action and training, in continuity or discontinuity with preceding actions. In Table 10, which shows the timeline for the main phases of the action-research itinerary, for example, we see how the constitution of the group started in September 2017 for the directive team, and how it was followed, starting in January 2018 till September 2018 with the formation of the enlarged team.

Tab. 10 – Number of focus groups and ICL community participants (qualitative phase)

| Action | 2017 | | 2018 | | | | 2019 | | | | | 2020* | | | | 2021-2022 | | | | |
|--|---------|-----|------|---------|----------|-----|---------|---------|---------|------|----------|---------|-----|---------|----------|-----------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| | Sep-Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb-Apr | May-July | Sep | Oct-Dec | Jan-Feb | Mar-May | June | July-Oct | Nov-Dec | Jan | Feb-Mar | June-Sep | Oct-Dec | Jan-Apr | May-Ag | Sep-Dec | Jan-Mar |
| Selection and construction of the directive team and description of the Project of educational action-research | █ | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Qualitative phase:</i> Preparation of the analysis instruments: interviews and <i>focus group</i> drafts | | █ | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Selection and training of the enlarged team | | | █ | █ | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Planning and organization of the FG and the interviews | | | | | █ | █ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Execution of the meetings of the FC and interviews | | | | | | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | | | | | | | |
| <i>Quantitative phase:</i> Start of work in the analysis of qualitative data and creation of Qs | | | | | | | | | | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | | | | | | |
| Translation, use of Qs <i>online</i> Contacts for the consignment of Qs | | | | | | | | | | | | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | | | |
| Administration of Qs | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | █ | █ | | |
| Description and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data | | | | | | | | | | | | | | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | |
| Preparation and staging of Conference Presentation of the research | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | █ | █ | |
| Editing and publication of the <i>Report</i> of the research and the proceedings of the Conference | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | █ | █ | █ |

* In March 2020 the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic caused an interruption and a modification of planned timelines for the administration of the Questionnaire online, and, as a result, the date of the International Conference was moved.

The broken line located at March 2020 indicated the period in which it was necessary to interrupt the research field work and delay the administration of the Questionnaire. The process, as has already been said, therefore took longer than had been expected due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, but, even with certain limitations, it was still possible to achieve the targeted objectives. The involvement of people and institutions had allowed the creation of networks and knowledge which made it possible to hold the International Conference in November 2021. The event took place in Rome at the PUU and was widely attended.

In conclusion, the methodological approach of Action Research activated learning experiences which had “multiple effects” at various levels: a) the training/qualification of a group of research collaborators (a multidisciplinary coordination team of 5 researchers and an enlarged team of around 20 scholars and graduates belonging to a number of Institutions); b) the acquisition of knowledge, awareness and competence on the part of those who participated in the phases of the focus groups, interviews, the narration of ‘critical incidents’, as well as in the compilation of Questionnaire online⁴². For this reason, as mentioned previously, to describe the project, the three terms *action*, *research* and *training* were chosen in order to highlight the process through which a change/transformation in all participants through action and research could be realized.

10

Method, dimensions of analysis and data collection instruments

This project integrated the approaches, instruments, and the qualitative and quantitative analytical methods used in *Mixed Methods Research*⁴³. In the data collection phase we decided to integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches rather than treat them as two distinct alternatives, as can be seen in the contributions of Fiorenza Deriu⁴⁴, Nina Deliu⁴⁵ and Enrica Ottone⁴⁶ in this volume. This choice allowed us to go beyond the limits of a purely qualitative or quantitative approach and to combine the strong points of each methodology, so leading to a deeper and multifaceted understanding of the phenomena under review. Mixed methods are particularly useful to address the issues posed by complex investigations (such as this project) and add to the validity of the results obtained. This methodology allowed us to analyse, from various viewpoints and with different instruments, complex questions (the interpretation of the concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism, the opportunities and problems/challenges of cohabitation in multicultural training communities, operative intercultural competences), which were the targets of this present study, in conjunction with understanding the nature of the particular contexts observed. Not only, the phase of the survey conducted using qualitative instruments also provided essential elements for the construction of the structured Questionnaire with which to better focus on the research hypotheses.

Multi-level conceptualization guided the identification of relevant hypotheses for which empirical data could be collected. This is summarized in Table 11. The survey utilizes a series of factors of various kinds, which, despite belonging to different levels of analysis, by their very complexity place the concepts of multiculturalism, interculturalism and intercultural competences within a process of social production.

The application of the methodology of the Action Research with participatory dynamics and of an educational type led the research team to choose to activate a plural process of investigation and to combine both qualitative and quantitative instruments, as seen in Table 11. The instruments used were the following:

- a. *participant observation*;
- b. the focus group (using a system which consisted of from 2 to three meetings activated by facilitators for each group);
- c. the in-depth *interviews* aimed at significant testimonies;
- d. the *narration of ‘critical incidents’*;
- e. the structured *questionnaire* with closed questions, in 9 languages⁴⁷.

The implementation of these instruments lets us identify, analyse and improve the participatory mode of the given situation through the involvement of every single protagonist, whether they be researcher or subject of the research (students, teachers, trainers, and/or members of the ICL) who belonged to the formative communities who adhered to the project.

Tab. 11 – Framework for the conceptualization of the analysis dimensions with indications of the instruments used

| Dimensions of analysis and variables | Questionnaires (Question nos.) | Focus group (Question nos.) | Other: * ^ PO |
|--|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Anagraphical characteristics | | | |
| age, gender, civil status, education qualification | 1,2,3,4 | | * |
| country of origin, habitation status | 5,12,13 | | * |
| university attended | 14,15 | | * |
| Biographical aspects in migration history | | | |
| residence abroad / in Italy, migration path | 6,7,8 | | * |
| opportunities/problems in the process of inclusion | 9,10,11 | 1.2, 1.3 | |
| congregational belonging, experience in multicultural communities | 37,38,39 | | |
| relational networks | 59,60 | | |
| Multicultural cohabitation: opportunities/problems | | | |
| opportunities in multicultural co-habitation | 21,43 | 1.2 | * |
| problems in multicultural co-habitation | 22-27,44-50 | 1.3, 3.1 | * |
| relational climate in multicultural contexts | 20,42 | | * PO |
| Internationalization in learning contexts | | | |
| internationalization of members | 17,18,40,41 | | PO |
| multi-lingualism (communication, lessons, texts) | 19,28,29,45 | 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 | PO |
| plurality of training/didactic models | 30,31,32,51,52,53 | 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 | PO |
| Interculturality | | | |
| conceptualization of interculturality (and difference from multiculturalism) | 33,54,58 | 1.1 | PO |
| experience of interculturality | 34,55 | 2.1 | * PO |
| interculturality in training contexts | 35,36,56,57 | 2.2, 2.3 | PO |
| Intercultural competences | | | |
| knowledge, abilities, predispositions (behaviours etc.) to experience interculturality | 61,62 | 3.2, | * ^ PO |

Key: * = Form *Narration of Critical Incidents*; ^ = Form *Activity Sheet on The Competences...*;
PO= participant observation

The implementation of these instruments lets us identify, analyse and improve the participatory mode of the given situation through the involvement of every single protagonist, whether they be researcher or subject of the research (students, teachers, trainers, and/or members of the ICL) who belonged to the formative communities who adhered to the project.

10.1 Participant observation

Participant observation, a technique much-used in ethnographic research to gather information on the cultural processes at work in the contexts under examination, was used, combined with other techniques and instruments of qualitative or quantitative enquiry⁴⁸. However, this dimension was present and transversal from the beginning and it led to the collection of qualitative and quantitative data which comprised

“ethnographic notes”, useful for the conservation of the memory of what happened, in spoken or written form, by both the research team and, above all, in the contexts of the various units of analysis. Throughout all the phases of the action-research-training, in different forms and according to the phase, there was the direct involvement of the two main researchers of the situations under review. It is important to recognize that both researchers, Luca Pandolfi e Enrica Ottone, belong to an academic community involved in the project, and that Ottone is a member of a formative community of an ICL. The collection of the qualitative data used a variety of instruments: from written transcripts of the observations to the gathering and classification of documentation, paper, digital and multimedial, produced throughout all the phases of the research path. The unity existing among researchers meant an assiduous exchange, allowing those who wrote things down to contrast their point of view with others, to monitor the development of the research during all of its phases, and also to observe “from the back seat” the phenomena being studied, looking at it from the point of view of the participants. This does not detract from the recognition that we are always dealing with subjective interpretation, albeit rigorous and verified, and that observation is always a selective process.

Participant observation was experienced also by the extended team, particularly at the time of the focus groups meetings. Written notes containing the observations of both facilitators, one assuming the role of observer, were compiled for each meeting.

10.2 The focus groups and the individual interviews

The focus group is a discussion organized with a selected group of individuals in order to acquire opinions on a subject pertinent to the research. The term is often used interchangeably and as a synonym with *group interview*, but while the latter is a collection of single opinions, the focus group is characterized by a certain interactivity among participants and it is used also to collect the opinion of the group, not only that of individuals⁴⁹. In our case, especially at the beginning of the focus group, participation interaction (between 8 and 15 people per group) was limited: discussion was delayed initially so that everyone could be heard on a first round of question and response, then room was left for more chance of free interaction and expression. The procedure followed for the meetings is described in detail in the document entitled *The Three Focus Groups* to be found in the last part of this volume⁵⁰.

The group meetings focussed on three main themes, which are summarized in Table 12 below, and which are described in detail later.

Tab. 12 – Thematic focus of the focus groups (FG) and typology of participants

| | First meeting FG | Second meeting FG | Third meeting FG |
|---------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Thematic focus | <i>Multiculturalism and interculturality</i> | <i>Multiculturalism and education</i> | <i>Intercultural competences in multicultural education communities</i> |
| Questions investigated | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Differences between multiculturalism and interculturality – Living in a multicultural community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities • problems | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Examples of interaction and exchange – Examples of existing institutional proposals to promote interaction and exchange | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Challenging situations – Intercultural competences |
| Number of questions | 3 | 4 | 2 + a form on intercultural competences |
| Typology of participants | students, teachers, members of ICL | students, teachers, members of ICL | students, members of ICL |

The **first meeting**, entitled *Multiculturalism and interculturalism*, focussed on revealing, “measuring” and evaluating the opinions, knowledge and the positions of the participants about the two key concepts of the research, *multiculturalism* and *interculturalism*, and the difference between them. In terms of the actions completed by the end of the first meeting, they can be defined as follows: the participants (and by extension, the institutions they belonged to), having shared their opinions on the three questions prepared for the first focus group (Table 13), and having explored the theme, became aware of their own opinions, knowledge and positions about the two key concepts of the research, *multiculturalism* and *interculturalism*, and the difference between them. They also revealed some of the opportunities and problematics which emerge in a multicultural context.

The **second meeting**, entitled *Multiculturalism and education*, focussed on revealing, “measuring” and evaluating the opinions, knowledge and the positions of the participants with regards to the relationship between multiculturalism and the learning path, both on a personal level and with regard to institutional training activity. In terms of the actions completed by the end of the second focus group, they can be defined as follows: the participants (and by extension, the institutions they belonged to), having shared their opinions on the four questions prepared for the second focus group (Table 13), became aware of their own opinions, knowledge and positions about multiculturalism as a more or less integral part of the formation process, both on a personal level as well as with regard to institutional training activity.

The **third meeting**, entitled *Intercultural Competences in Multicultural Education Communities*, was not attended by teachers but only students and members of the ICL training communities. It focused on revealing, “measuring” and evaluating the opinions and the positions of the participants about the competences they considered useful in order to live and learn in multicultural formative contexts. Two questions were included for discussion, together with a form on intercultural competences. In terms of the actions completed by the end of the third focus group, they can be defined as follows: the participants (and by extension, the institutions they belonged to), having shared their opinions on the two questions prepared for the third focus group (Table 13), and also having compiled the form, became aware of their own opinions and positions about the competences they considered useful in order to live and learn in multicultural formative contexts.

Tab. 13 – List of questions posed in the three focus group meetings by participant type

| Focus Group | N. | Question | Type of Group |
|----------------|----|---|----------------------------|
| First Meeting | 1 | In your opinion, what is the difference between multiculturalism and interculturalism? | All |
| | 2 | The context in which you move (academic community or community of consecrated life) is a multicultural reality. When, and in what sense, is this an opportunity? | All |
| | 3 | The context in which you move is a multicultural reality. When, and in what sense, is this a problem? | All |
| Second Meeting | 4 | In the multicultural educational context in which you move (community of consecrated life) you interrelate daily with people whose culture is different from yours. Talk about some examples of interaction and exchange that you live here with people from cultures different from yours. | Members of ICL Communities |
| | | In the multicultural educational context in which you move (academic community) you interrelate daily with people whose culture is different from yours. Talk about some examples of interaction and exchange that you live here with people from cultures different from yours. | Teachers and Students |

| | | | |
|----------------------|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| | 5 | Thinking about your educational experience in the context you belong to, what kind of proposals are made by the people who head or manage this situation to promote multicultural interaction? Describe briefly. | Members ICL Communities |
| | | We are in a multicultural educational context. How does this reality change your didactic provision (lesson content, language used in lessons, strategies and methodology, manuals and bibliographies required at examinations?) (proposals) | Teachers |
| | | We are in a multicultural educational context. How does this reality change the didactic provision by the university (lesson content, language used in lessons, strategies and methodology, manuals and bibliographies required at examinations?) (proposals) | Students |
| | 6 | How do you evaluate the proposals which have been listed? Express your evaluation. | All |
| | 7 | If you could suggest other proposals, what would you indicate? | All |
| Third Meeting | 8 | What are the problems (or challenging situations) you meet up with in a multicultural formative community? In a note on a post-it, write down a problem you encounter with reference to the multicultural formative context to which you belong. | Members ICL Communities and Students |
| | 9 | Starting from the problems mentioned and your own experience in multicultural formative contexts, in your opinion what are the competences required today in order to react efficaciously and appropriately when you are in a relationship with people who have a language and a culture different from yours? Each one of you, describe the three aspects you consider to be the most useful on the form provided. | Members ICL Communities and Students |

26 groups were formed in total and 65 focus groups meetings took place. 298 people were interviewed, distributed as follows: 92 university teachers and 98 university students, and 108 members of ICL formative communities. There were 13 participating Institutions, mostly located in Central Italy, but with some in the North and the South (Table 14).

Tab. 14 – Thematic focus of the focus groups (FG) and typology of participants

| | University Teachers | University Students | Members ICL | Total |
|--|---|--|-----------------|-------|
| Participants | 92 | 98 | 108 | 298 |
| Groups | 8 | 9 | 9 | 26* |
| Meetings organized per group | 2 | 3 | 3 | – |
| Meetings held (or focus groups) | 12/16 organized (4 groups attended only one of the two organized meetings) | 26/27 organized (1 group attended only two of the three organized meetings) | 27/27 organized | 65 |
| Institutions / Communities | 6 | | 7 | 13 |

* Number of groups who attended at least one meeting.

The research was also designed to include individual interviews with educators and members of the communities of Consecrated Life, and with teachers and students. The structured interviews had an outline made up of 8 questions: the first six were the same for all interviewees, while the last 2 varied according to the type of interviewee. It remains to be said that the outline could be adapted to the interview sit-

uation, both in formulation and sequence. The questions reflect the aspects investigated in the focus groups with some slight differences (Table 15). 8 interviews took place, distributed as follows:

- 2 members of the communities of Consecrated Life (male)
- 5 educators from Institutes of Consecrated Life (4 male trainers and 1 female trainer)
- 1 teacher consecrated woman (female).

The way the interviews were conducted, their recording and transcription, as for the focus groups, was the responsibility of the facilitators (operators, observers, interviewers) during the training session: the completed forms and their entire content is reported in the last part of this volume⁵¹.

Tab. 15 – Interview questions

| Questions | no. questions per type* | | | |
|--|-------------------------|---|----|---|
| | T | S | Tr | M |
| Often, in social analysis, in educational provision, in information dissemination or in the mass media, the words multiculturalism and interculturalism are used interchangeably and as synonyms. Do you detect a difference between the two, and if so, how do they differ? | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| We live in a multicultural reality. When, and in what way, is this an opportunity? | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| When, and in what way, is it a problem? | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Have you ever experienced a communication or interrelational problem with a person belonging to a cultural tradition which is different from yours? Can you describe it briefly? | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| In your view, how can problematic situations like the ones you have described be overcome? | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| What kind of attention to multicultural interaction is included in the educational proposals made by the people who live in your situation? Can you describe them briefly? | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| We are in a multicultural context. How does this change your didactic provision (lesson content, language used in lessons and manuals, bibliographies required at examinations)? | 7 | | | |
| We are in a multicultural context. How is this reflected in your teachers' didactic provision (if you need to, give examples: lesson content, language used in lessons and manuals, bibliographies required at examinations)? | | 7 | | |
| We are in a multicultural context. How is this reflected in the choice of educators? (In their multicultural origin, for example, or the choice of people with solid multicultural experience, or in possession of intercultural skills.) | | | 7 | |
| We are in a multicultural context. How does this affect the organization of formation, thinking about your formative community of the consecrated life? | | | | 7 |
| If you could make any suggestions to the Institution where you are a teacher or a student, what would you propose? | 8 | 8 | | |
| If you could make any suggestions to the Institution where you are an educator, what would you propose? | | | 8 | |
| If you could make any suggestions to the community/congregation to which you belong about the issues we have talked about in this questionnaire, what would you propose? | | | | 8 |

* Key: T = Teacher; S = Student; Tr = Trainer of ICL; M = Member of community of ICL

During the training session it was shown how to proceed with the recording and the transcription of the dialogues of the focus groups and the individual interviews. The facilitators used the forms for the collection of data about participant information (gender, civil status, country of origin) together with some details about the times and

mode of the meetings. The files with the transcriptions and the observations were uploaded within 2 weeks of the holding of the meeting or the interview on an online space to which all members of the team had access⁵².

Starting in June 2019, the files containing the transcriptions and the attached forms were collected by the researchers and the work started on the revision, ordering and preparation for the processing phase. This was followed by a process of text analysis using the software *IramuteQ* and MAXQDA, basing our work on an interpretative model derived from *grounded theory*⁵³. The corpus of the 65 focus groups was very large, comprising 313,892 total tokens and 12,847 types⁵⁴. The in-depth analysis of the results obtained from the first question of the first type of *focus*, performed by Nina Deliu, should be carried out, also, for the other questions. The coding of the second *focus* on formative contexts was completed and concluded, but the report with the results has not been finalized. A description of the coding operative for the *corpus* of the questions of the second focus is included in the last part of this volume. This will be the subject of future analysis. The modification of the time frame for the reasons cited previously, but also the great amount of work involved in this type of qualitative investigation, has meant that only a part of this analysis has been completed, to date.

10.3 The questionnaire

In the second stage of the Action Research, with regard to the research focus, objectives and hypotheses, after a provisional initial analysis of the results gathered from the focus groups and from the data that emerged from the participant observation, a structured Questionnaire was compiled. Reflections on the data resulting from the qualitative phase led to the constitution of this empirical base: we introduced additional factors into several questions in the Questionnaire and their respective items, which had been underplayed during the phase of conceptualization of the problematics and the formulation of the hypotheses of the project.

The Questionnaire was drafted in Italian between June 2019 and December 2020, translated into 8 languages (English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, and Korean) between January and February 2020, and implemented online with *LimeSurvey* in December. In the month of January, 2021, as described in Luca Di Censi's contribution, this volume, the Questionnaire was tested in order to check for a series of factors linked to the questions which could lead to distortion (complexity or obscurity of the question, over-determination, under-determination, obtrusiveness): this was also carried out on the translations in the various languages. After a careful process of pre-testing, the definitive version of the Questionnaire, constituting 62 questions, was produced.

From January to February 2019 the work of organizing the phases of administration and contacting the Institutions had begun, but at the beginning of March, due to the restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic affecting Italy in this period and subsequent months, it was decided to interrupt the work and delay the administration of the Questionnaire. It was only possible to restart this phase a year later, from March and June 2021 (Table 10). Anyway, as we described in the first part of this paper, we believe the pandemic situation had a large impact on the number of people that we were able to reach. The survey produced 535 Questionnaire (of which 401 furnished answers to the section relative to the formative houses of the consecrated life, and 469 to ecclesiastical academic institutions⁵⁵. The structuring of the Questionnaire and the distribution of the questions in relation to the dimensions of analysis and the item variables are described in Table 11. The processing and the presentation of the results was done by Luca Di Censi⁵⁶.

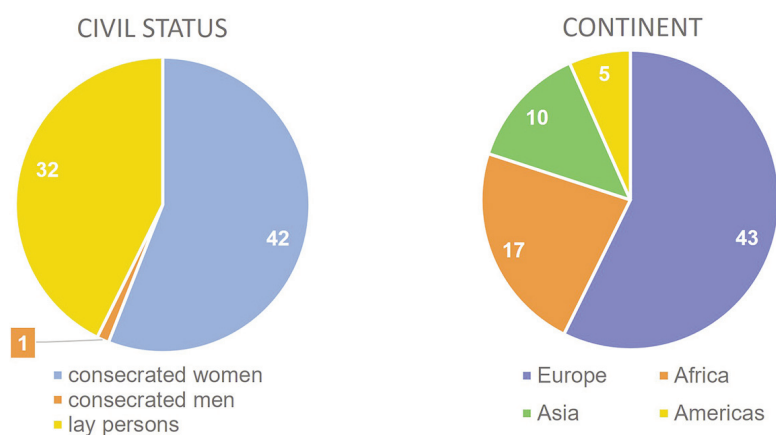
10.4 Narrating 'critical incidents'

This instrument consists of a form containing instructions for the written composition of a story. It makes use of the methodology of the narration of 'critical incidents', previously used in other kinds of research in both Italian and international contexts. The form, entitled *A Challenging Situation in a Multicultural Context*, describes the task to complete individually in the various phases, and provides a frame for the identification and the detailed description of an episode perceived as being challenging.

The form was introduced in the first phase of qualitative analysis, and the task was presented to the participants of the third meeting of the focus group and to a group of students from PFSEA in a period covering 2018 to 2021. Each participant was asked to tell a story in written form, providing a brief description of a situation or an event which was a challenge to deal with.

This is intended not only in the sense of a problematic incident or event (something unusual, disturbing, or irritating which could have created misunderstanding, problems or conflict); it could also be an episode of efficacious and positive interaction and exchange in a multicultural context (something experienced by the protagonist as pleasantly surprising and positive)⁵⁷. In total, with the guide of a tutor, 75 students completed the task (42 lay persons and 33 consecrated men and women), coming from 23 countries in 4 continents (Graph. 2). The activity consisted in a guided path through moments of individual reflection, comparison and exchange with the facilitator and colleagues⁵⁸.

Graph. 2 – Distribution of the 75 participants by civil status and continent



The analytical procedure of the 75 written stories from the participants required a qualitative approach which was similar to the one used for the analysis of the transcription of the focus groups. The database of the stories is relatively small, but can still appropriately be treated by the electronic textware (MAXQDA e *Iramuteq*): the corpus of the 75 narratives consists of 44,384 total tokens and 3,326 types. The analysis of the material, carried out by Enrica Ottone, revealed three categories of types of challenging situations which could result in 'critical incidents' in learning contexts, in community life and in work/mission realities. These enabled us to explore the competences used by the participants, the impact of immediate reactions, the force of emotions, and the effects of choices and actions⁵⁹.

Conclusion

The general objective of this research project was to understand the transformations in people which occurred or were absent with regard to the learning experiences, and the intercultural competences developed, in those living in formative contexts with a high level of multiculturalism. During the course of the four years dedicated to action-research-training, we were able to collect a large quantity of qualitative and quantitative data, which have only been partially analysed in this *Report*, as we have explained previously: we are fully aware that our work hasn't finished with the publication of this volume.

We have come to know many people and processes in multicultural educational contexts and we have become more cognizant of the opportunities, the limits and the open challenges; we have reflected on the opportunities in training to develop intercultural competences and the roads which have been opened up and need to be opened up in the future. We have also tested out the usefulness of a series of instruments. Walking together we have discovered a path, by the side of others already created, and we have grown together in knowledge, understanding and intercultural sensibility, travelling with many other people who were already on the path.

The obtained results and presented in this *Report* have demonstrated the need to continue to investigate educational dimensions: we have known for some time that interculturality is *an obligatory way and a point of no return*⁶⁰, but we have also come to realize that we have a lot to learn in order to achieve translating this awareness into choices and institutional learning itineraries which go beyond improvisation, and which are fully integrated into formation contexts at various levels of formality, some more formal, some less so.



Endnotes

1. A summarized report of the research project, *International Sisters in the United States*, in English and Spanish, can be found on the Internet site of the GHR Foundation, a philanthropic foundation based in Minneapolis (MN) at the behest of Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhorst, who financed both the American research and the one described here. The link to the English version of the research summary is the following: http://www.ghrfoundation.org/uploads/3/1/3/1/31315939/international_sisters_study_-_ghr.pdf. The research was published in M. JOHNSON – M. GAUTIER – P. WITTEBERG – T.T. DO, *Migration for Mission: International Catholic Sisters in the United States*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY 2019.
2. Cf K. MAHONEY, “To Look More Closely”, in E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education in Multiculturality, Education to Interculturality: In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy*, Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2023, 9-10.
3. Cf. F. RUGGE (ed.), *L'internazionalizzazione della formazione superiore in Italia. Le università*, CRUI 2018. In <https://www2.cruir.it/cruir/cruir-rapporto-inter-digitale.pdf> (19/02/2022).
4. One example is the PFSE, Rome, where research into intercultural education started in the 1990s thanks to the work of professor Hsiang-Chu Ausilia Chang. Cf. H.-C.A. CHANG – M. CHECHIN, *L'educazione interculturale. Prospettive pedagogico-didattiche degli Organismi internazionali e della Scuola Italiana*, LAS, Roma 1996; H.-C.A. CHANG, *Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione "Auxilium": un'istituzione internazionale "laboratorio" di formazione interculturale*, “Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione” 45 (2007) 3, 90-97.
5. The course was created by UISG: <http://www.internationalunionsuperiorsgeneral.org>; <https://archive.is/eujRE>. News about it was published in the daily newspaper *Agensir*: <https://www.agensir.it/quotidiano/2020/12/18/vita-religiosa-uisg-un-corso-di-formazione-online-su-interculturalita-e-leadership>; <https://archive.is/Duchb>.
6. USG – 89th Assembly of 27 May 2017 entitled *Il discernimento vocazionale in un mondo interculturale* (<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1eTcYhSAhYkRtliqA9u4UK9OQ5F5llu8i>) Very interesting papers (translated in several languages) include: A. Sosa [Superior General of the Society of Jesus], *Interculturalidad, Catolicidad y Vida Consagrada* (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZQr4wYnmrk6OtnKx1JnKpxnwNibTJHT/edit>) and M. WEBER [SVD Rector at the Divine Word Theologate, Chicago, IL], *Vocational Discernment in an Intercultural World* (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zcGXXks2srOq1Nae6xPwbZFW-UiINvzz/edit>) (14/02/2022).
7. J.P. KIRBY, *Intercultural Competence for Religious Communities: Models, Gauges and Guides*, Paper given at the SEDOS Residential Seminar, Rome 2016 (<https://docplayer.net/129514711-Intercultural-competence-for-religious-communities-models-gauges-and-guides.html>) (26/02/2022).
8. The *Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission* (SEDOS) is a scholarly forum for the understanding and documentation of the experiences of catholic missionaries, born during the second Vatican Council, in which around 84 ICL male and female missionaries participated, SEDOS has always been committed to promoting, documenting and encouraging open and courageous critical reflection on major themes relevant to ecclesiastical and global frontiers. Cf. <https://sedosmission.org>; <https://archive.is/qG5GR>.
9. Two extensive publications of 2015 are dedicated to the study and reflection on multicultural life and action of ICL, and contain various contributions from the catholic world. Cf. L.T. STANISLAUS – M. UEFFING (eds.), *Intercultural Living*, vol. I, Sankt Augustin, New Delhi 2015 and Id. (eds.), *Intercultural Mission*, vol. II, Sankt Augustin, New Delhi 2015.
10. Cf. CONSIGLIO GENERALE MISSIONARI COMBONIANI, *L'interculturalità nella comunità comboniana*, 1999. In: <https://www.comboni.org/app-data/files/allegati/2064.pdf> (14/02/2022).

11. Cf. PROVINCIA ITALIANA MISSIONARI COMBONIANI, *Missione e interculturalità. La prassi interculturale come sfida missionaria*, “Quaderni di Limone” 11 (2018). (http://www2019.laicicomboniani.it/download/simposio_comboniano/Quaderni%20di%20Limone_2018.pdf).
12. Cf. AA.VV., *L'interculturalità: nuovo paradigma della Missione*. Conference proceedings, Istituto Missioni della Consolata – Rome 4-7 December 2009, Edizioni Missioni Consolata, Roma 2010.
13. See an interesting contribution by S.Y. RAJA, *Inter-culture and Multi-culture. Their Implication in the Life and Mission of the Sons of Divine Providence*, “Messaggi di Don Orione” 50 (2018) 9-26 and S. DABIRÈ, *Multiculturalité et interculturalité de la vie religieuse Orioniste en contexte africain*, “Messaggi di Don Orione” 50 (2018) 27-50.
14. From 18 to 22 November 2019, at Collevaleza, the conference *Insieme senza esitare* took place. *La Vita Consacrata fra diversità generazionali e culturali*, promoted by “Conferenza Italiana Superiori Maggiori” (CISM) and the “Unione delle Superiori Maggiori Italiane” (USMI) with the collaboration of “Ufficio Nazionale per la pastorale delle vocazioni” of the “Conferenza Episcopale Italiana” (CEI) [Episcopal Conference of Italy]. The various presentations and workshops are contained in a publication where two contributions are from two members of our research team Cf. L. PANDOLFI, *Cultura e transculture, tra comunità di vita e comunità di pratica nella vita consacrata*, in Quaderni CISM, *Insieme senza esitare, la vita consacrata fra diversità generazionali e culturali*, Ancora editrice, Milano 2020, 80-92 and M. CATTANEO, *Tra immaginario e reale: le dinamiche fraterne nella diversità culturale e generazionale*, in Quaderni CISM, *Insieme senza esitare, la vita consacrata fra diversità generazionali e culturali*, Ancora editrice, Milano 2020, 93-101.
15. P. MILETO, *Camminare la diversità: la vita consacrata nella sfida della multiappartenenza etno-culturale nel mondo in globalizzazione*, 2018; <https://www.comboni.org/contenuti/109905>; <https://archive.is/1tpw8>.
16. Team biographical note: in April 2020 Elisabetta expired from Covid-19. It was a significant loss for us.
17. This will be picked up on later. Cf. L. PANDOLFI, *Formation in Multiculturality, Formation towards Interculturality: Challenges to Embrace and Necessary Transformations*, in E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education in Multiculturality, Education to Interculturality: In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy*, Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2023, 235-264.
18. The bibliography related to cultural anthropological, psycho-social and socio-political reflections is wide and far-reaching. Some texts, which have influenced us, include: M. DE CERTEAU, *La culture au pluriel*, Union Générale d'Éditions, Paris 1974; U. HANNERZ, *Transnational connections: culture, people, places*. Routledge, London – New York, NY 1996 (It. transl: *La diversità culturale*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2001). We have provided a broad summary: cf. L. PANDOLFI, *Universali antropologici e teorie del pluralismo*, “Euntes Docete” 58 (2005) 1, 39-69. Id., *Vivere il pluralismo. Sfide e diritti di cittadinanza*, “Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione” 48 (2010) 2, 230-240.
19. Cf. L. PANDOLFI, *Animazione interculturale cooperativa*, in Id. (ed.), *Interculturalidad cooperativa. Il Progetto/1*, Aracne Ed., Roma 2010 e Id., *Pluralità e transculture nella comunicazione contemporanea*, “Euntes Docete” 64 (2011) 1, 11-35. For an interesting synthesis cf. P. BALBONI, *Parole comuni, Culture diverse. Guida alla comunicazione interculturale*, Marsilio Editore, Venezia 1999. Balboni distinguishes macro-areas, which he defines as “domains”, such as *social relationships, social organization, the family and the home, the city, the school, the mass media*; for each of these domains he proposes a wide series of locations, behaviours, prospects, modes and specific, transforming representations. We also recognize the contribution of G. HOFSTEDE, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, McGraw-Hill, London 1991, where the author proposes that all culturally-marked subjects are in possession of a kind of *software*, not rigid, but flexible, even if intrinsic, which processes linguistic and intercultural social interactions.
20. Cf. A. FANTINI, *Exploring and Assessing Intercultural Competence* (CSD Research Paper No. 07-01), Washington University – Center for Social Development, St. Louis, MO 2007; P. REGGIO – M. SANTERINI (eds.), *Le competenze interculturali nel lavoro educativo*, Carocci, Roma 2014.

21. Cf. in E. OTTONE, *Intercultural Competences under Construction: Qualitative Analysis of Narration of Critical Incidents by a Group of University Students*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 184. The definition of intercultural competences is built starting from the vision of competence presented in M. PELLERÉY, *Le competenze individuali e il portfolio*, RCS Libri, Milano 2004, 12.23-64.
22. Cf. A. PORTERA (ed.), *Competenze interculturali. Teoria e pratica nei settori scolastico-educativo, giuridico, aziendale, sanitario e della mediazione culturale*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2013; D.K. DEARDORFF, *Manual for Developing Intercultural Competence*, UNESCO Publishing/Routledge Focus, New York, NY 2020.
23. Cf. H. DE WIT – F. HUNTER, *The Future of Internationalization of Higher Education in Europe*, “International Higher Education” 83 (2015) 3; H. DE WIT, *Le università e il ruolo dell’internazionalizzazione*, “Vita e Pensiero” 93 (2012) 6, 117-122.
24. During the research, when contacting various male or female ICL, we were told about the choice not to have formative houses in Rome or in Italy, about the substantial reduction in the number of candidates for the Consecrated Life, and the location of their training itineraries (postulancy, novitiate, juniorate, etc.) in non-Italian and non-European contexts, with a view to living more immediately a presence/training in a plural world and experience of mission *loci*.
25. Cf. J.R. FRAENKEL – N.E. WALLEN – H.H. HYUN, *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*, McGraw-Hill Education, New York, NY 2019, (It. transl.: *Come progettare e valutare la ricerca in educazione*, LAS, Roma 2019, 171-ss.).
26. Cf. L. DI CENSI, *The Intercultural Challenge in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities: Results of the Quantitative Survey*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 160.
27. 20 ICL communities participated in a definitive and verifiable way (7 for the qualitative phase and 20 for the quantitative phase). Probably in the diffusion of the questionnaires online many members of the ICL formative communities – often students of the academic communities involved (6 for the qualitative phase and 10 for the quantitative phase) – could have compiled it. Many others had news of it and had access to it. It is important to note that in such a vast population and with the characteristics relevant to the project, the proposal of Action Research with an educational dimension requires an aware and participatory acceptance on the part of the institutions contacted. Many of these, whose dynamics and reasons are commented on in the final part of this report, demonstrated a lot of resistance, mainly indifference and in some cases explicit opposition to their involvement and to the diffusion of posting of the items of the research to the trainees of the same institution. And so, besides the evident fact that every sample on which a survey is based is a part (hopefully a representative one) of the observed population, in our case it was extremely difficult to count on the numbers and the sampling hypotheses imagined in the design phase. So the places contacted and finally involved in the research, not always, but often, were the result of a long work of mediation and personal communication, constructed on relationships, associations and networks with friends and colleagues. This participatory dynamic was important in widening the network of collaboration and also the fact that members of the directing and extended team came from and operated, in part, from inside the population under review.
28. In the second phase other Roman pontifical universities appear, not contacted by the research team but attended by consecrated men and women present in the ICL formative houses which had been and who had compiled the Questionnaire.
29. Other changes happened during the course of the research due to the restrictions which were brought in consequent to the Covid-19 pandemic.
30. DI CENSI, *The Intercultural*, 161.
31. Cf. FRAENKEL – WALLEN – HYUN, *Come progettare*, 946-947.
32. The Questionnaire and the *Activity Sheet: The competences that are useful in multicultural training contexts* were compiled anonymously and it is not possible to arrive at the total number of the people involved in the research. We can hypothesize that a certain number of those who completed the Questionnaire also took part in one or more phases of the research conducted with qualitative instruments. Therefore, it is not possible to calculate exactly the total number of people involved in one or more phases of the research. The survey, at a rough estimate, certainly included a minimum of 650 people.

33. An up-to-date list of the ecclesiastical institutions of higher education of the Holy See (Universities, Faculties and specialized Institutes) is available at <http://www.educatio.va/content/cec/it/istituzioni—facolta.html>; <https://archive.is/d9q6c>.
34. Cf. DI CENSI, *The Intercultural*, 167.
35. The national Secretary of the USMI collaborated with the research both in the qualitative and the quantitative phases. The two regional branches, in Lazio and Sicily, even though contacted in both phases, did not adhere to the project.
36. Cf. The *Activity Sheet* in Part five of this Volume: *The Three Focus Groups*, 356-363.
37. The form was administered to: 80 consecrated men and women participants at the “Convegno Annuale di formazione e pastorale vocazionale” CISM/USMI and “Ufficio di Pastorale Vocazionale” (Collevalenza, Perugia, March 2019); 50 young consecrated men and women at the “Corso sul carisma della famiglia Paolina”, (Rome, 17 November 2018); 90 novices of the “noviziato inter-congregazionale” at Marino (Rome) in March 2019; 55 students of the “Corso di qualifica in Formatrici e Formatori nell’ambito della vita consacrata della Facoltà”, PFSEA (Rome, 13 November 2018).
38. One of the two ICL, however, did not communicate the number of communities and the number of people in training who were reached.
39. The action-research-training approach followed here shares some aspects with *Design Based Research* (DBR), which was developed in the 1990s with the studies of Ann Brown and Alan Collins: it consists of a systematic, but at the same time flexible, investigative methodology appropriate for real learning and training contexts and which presupposes an interaction between researchers and the project previously designed by them with the communities and/or people in formation who participate in the project. To go further into the differences between the two approaches cf. T. ANDERSON – J. SHATTUCK, *Design-based Research: A Decade of Progress in Education Research?*, “Educational researcher” 41 (2012), 1, 16-25.
40. Cf. E. OTTONE, *Diritto all’educazione e processi educativi scolastici. Un percorso di ricerca-azione in una scuola secondaria di secondo grado*, LAS, Roma 2006, 103-108.
41. Cf. B. CUNNINGHAM, *Action Research. Toward a Procedural Model*, “Human Relations” 29 (1976) 3, 215-238; OTTONE, *Diritto*, 117.
42. For example, several members of a group of students, at the conclusion of the administration of the Questionnaire online, came into the classroom, and in a brief moment of discussion, expressed their satisfaction with their experience and said that the questions of the Questionnaire had made them think about certain aspects of their experience in multicultural contexts which they had never previously thought about.
43. Cf. J.W. CRESWELL – V.L.P. CLARK, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, Sage publications, Thousand Oaks, CA 2017; S. MAUCERI, *Qualità nella quantità. La survey research nell’era dei Mixed Methods*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2019.
44. Cf. F. DERIU, *Intercultural Competences in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities: Key Concepts Identified by the Text Analyses of Focus Groups*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 70-112.
45. Cf. N. DELIU, *Multiculturality and Interculturality: A Qualitative Analysis of the Perspective of Focus Group Participants*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 113-158.
46. Cf. OTTONE, *Intercultural*, 182-234.
47. The listed instruments are described in the *Appendices* of this volume.
48. Cf. G. D’AGOSTINO, *L’osservazione partecipante. Un topos metodologico problematico*, in V. MATERA (ed.), *Storia dell’etnografia. Autori, teorie, pratiche*, Carocci, Roma 2020, 85-110, and particularly G. LAPASSADE – V.A. D’ARMENTO, *L’etnosociologia*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2009.
49. Cf. A. GIBBS, *Focus Groups and Group Interviews*, in R. COE – M. WARING – L.V. HEDGES – J. ARTHUR (eds.), *Research Methods & Methodologies in Education*, SAGE Publications, London 2017², 190.

50. Cf. *The Three Focus Groups*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 356-363.
51. Cf. *Interview Outlines* and *The Three Focus Groups*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 356-363.
52. A course was set up using the Moodle platform of the PFSEA (<https://didatticaonline.pfse-auxilium.org/>; <https://archive.is/AbXYn>) to encourage the communication and exchange of information among the enlarged team and for the collection of transcriptions and relative documentation of the focus groups and the interviews.
53. The text preparation work for the qualitative analysis phase was completed by the authors of this paper. Prof. Deriu provided us with the information for the creation of the files which would be compatible with the textware *IramuteQ*. Later, the text documents were modified in order to be analysed also with the software MAXQDA, which uses different criteria. Prof. Nina Deliu worked in this second phase, together with the authors, and in collaboration with Francesca Fratarcangeli. For more details about the methodology and the textware used in the qualitative analysis see the contributions of Deriu e Deliu, this volume.
54. Cf. DERIU, *Intercultural*, 73.
55. Cf. DI CENSI, *The Intercultural*, 162.
56. Cf. *ivi*.
57. Cf. OTTONE, *Intercultural*, 186.
58. Cf. *Tool for the Narration of Critical Incidents*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education* 364-365.
59. Cf. OTTONE, *Intercultural*, 182-234.
60. Cf. A. PEROTTI, *Plaidoyer pour l'interculturel*, Editions du Conseil de l'Europe, Strasbourg 1994 (It. transl., *La via obbligata dell'interculturalità*, Editrice Missionaria Italiana, Bologna 1994).

Part Two

**UNIVERSITY, CONSECRATED LIFE
AND EDUCATION
IN CULTURAL PLURALITY**
Analysis of the Qualitative
and Quantitative Research



Intercultural Competences in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities

Key Concepts Identified by the Text Analyses of Focus Groups*

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Abstract

This chapter illustrates the results of the lexical and textual analysis of focus groups, with 296 participants who are members of the Institute of Consecrated Life, ecclesiastical institutions of higher education and their teachers.

The focus groups provide an in-depth analysis of three key aspects of this research: a) how multiculturalism and interculturalism are perceived; b) how participants design training programmes and activities fostering intercultural experiences and networking; c) how to identify educational difficulties and skills needed to foster interculturalism in multicultural contexts.

The software used for the lexical and textual analysis is called *IramuteQ*. During this research, we detected specificities, extracted multiword expressions, analysed co-occurrences and identified some semantic clusters using Reinert's classification technique. Several issues and opportunities emerged from this study, mostly stemming from the coexistence in different contexts of people with heterogeneous cultural backgrounds and multiple identity reference points. More in general, interculturalism has various nuances of meaning.

Keywords

Lexical and textual analysis – Semantic clusters – Multiculturalism – Multiculturalism – Interculturalism – Educational communities

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* Translated from the original Italian by Felicia Sicignano

Introduction

This research sets out to analyse if and how diversity becomes a real opportunity for the interchange of ideas and interculturality in two strongly multicultural contexts, such as those of the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (ICL) and the religious academic communities.

The core assumption is that life in a multicultural educational community where meeting and sharing experiences with people from different cultural backgrounds are encouraged, fostered and promoted could bring opportunities and complications in developing intercultural skills. This was our research group focus, around which they developed an articulated system of research techniques and methods and envisaged three possible scenarios:

- a) multiculturalism is not managed in any way. This may be due to different reasons: the belief that the principle of equality alone is sufficient (the vision of universalism); the conviction that diversity is the other person's problem and they need to become "like us" (assimilationism); the lack of competence in dealing with implications;
- b) multiculturalism is only superficially managed, following the principle of mere tolerance of diversity and peaceful coexistence;
- c) multiculturalism is managed using an intercultural vision, which means providing opportunities for personal and institutional transformation and growth through the promotion of interchange processes and the development of certain interpersonal abilities, such as tolerance, listening skills and empathy, because focusing on another person other than yourself allows for a marked shift in perspective.

The methodological approach used in this Action Research is the mixed method. The research plan combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches, through the organisation of focus groups, detailed interviews, a survey with a structured questionnaire, monitoring interview questions and two feedback sessions, halfway and at the end of the research project.

This chapter presents the results of the focus groups' textual content analysis, whose members were ICL communities, university students and teachers of the ecclesiastical academic institutions.

* The list of institutions participating can be found in: E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI, *Interculturality in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities: An Action-Research-Training Project in Italy*, in I.D. (eds.), *Education in Multiculturalism, Education to Interculturality In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy*, Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2023, 48-50

1

Methodology

1.1

Activity planning for the focus groups (FG)

In total, 64 focus groups were involved in the project from September 2018 to January 2020. The 298 participants were university teachers, students and members of the ICL communities (a total of 26 groups interviewed). Each participant was involved in one or more focus groups. In Table 1 below, there are some details on how the research activity was organised.

Tab. 1 – Focus groups participants

| | University teachers | University students | ICL members | Total |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|--|-------|
| FG* participants | 106 | 98 | 108 | 298 |
| Groups interviewed | 8 | 9 | 9 | 26 |
| Meetings organised | 12 | 26 | 27 | 65 |
| Institutions/Community of the groups interviewed* | 6 * 4 groups only took part in 1 FG out of 2 | * 1 group took part in 2 FG out of 3 | 7 3 female, 5 male, 1 mixed group/s | 13 |

1.2 Guidelines for conducting focus groups

The three different focus groups, involving 298 participants, examine the three key aspects of this research:

- a) *Topic FG 1 – The perception of multiculturalism and interculturalism.* In this focus group, we worked with members of highly multicultural communities and tried to understand whether participants knew the distinction between multiculturalism and interculturalism, and if the opportunity to mix with people with different cultural backgrounds and provenance was perceived positively or not;
- b) *Topic FG 2 – Experiences of cultural interchange – Intercultural education programmes.* This group focused on two aspects affecting the 3 different groups interviewed: ICL members, teachers and students. At first, participants were asked about their experiences of interchange and interaction with people of a different cultural background, and to take examples specifically from their community of provenance (formation community or academic institution.) Subsequently, we asked specific questions to individual groups: ICL members were asked to describe if known, what their community leaders proposed to foster and encourage multicultural exchange. As for the focus groups with academic lecturers, they were asked to describe how they had modified their didactic curricula; while the focus group with students was asked about their university teaching programmes, and how their academic institutions address cultural variety;
- c) *Topic FG 3 – Educational issues and specific competences.* This focus group aimed to reveal the main issues that might arise in a highly multicultural context and the necessary and most effective skills needed to best interact with people with a different language and culture. For this task, respondents were given a worksheet on which they selected at least three skills they considered a priority¹.

The notes used during interviews are available in the last section of this report, along with a document used by facilitators, with detailed instructions on conducting the focus groups. Facilitators were duly trained for the tasks².

1.3 Plan for the analysis of focus groups

Each focus group (FG) was recorded, discussions were transcribed and saved in plain text (*coding* UTF-8), so as to later undergo automated analysis³. Each text is labelled using key variables for text partition as follows:

- a) Identification ****NUM
- b) *Number* – Focus group *FG (options: 3 types of focus groups for each of the 3 topics studied)
- c) Types of participants in the focus group *TipCom (3 types: members of the consecrated communities (VC), students (STUD), lecturers/tutors (DOC))
- d) Participants' gender *Sesso (three options: F or M or MF).

Sample label:

****0006 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_STUD *Sesso_MF

The label above refers to focus group 1 of a mixed group of male and female students. The label is in Italian, but sufficiently self-explanatory.

In the first stage, before the text analysis, the procedure was as follows:

- a) creating a record of all personal names, places, institution, etc.⁴;
- b) creating a record of all the acronyms⁵;
- c) inserting all the stressed vowels in words/ stressed verbs;
- d) identifying all the *n-grams*⁶ in the text with a specific meaning that referred precisely to the research topic⁷.

N-grams were identified through the analysis of repeated segments. The following criteria were used for the selection stage:

- a) relevance to the research topic;
- b) occurrence – generally higher or equal to the average frequency in a corpus, except when specific meaning is particularly relevant to the study.

The corpus was analysed in the following order:

- a) calculation of the main lexicometric measurements for its validation;
- b) study of the vocabulary of the entire corpus;
- c) analysis of the 3 FG's characteristics based on variation partitioning, Focus group;
- d) creation of three *sub-corpora*, one for each focus group and analysis of their characteristics based on variation partitioning TipCom for FG 2 e 3;
- e) application of Reinert's classification method to identify semantic clusters in each of the three sub-corpus and discussion of the groups identified;
- f) The procedure for the classification of *sub-corpora* was the following:
 - f1. Analysis of the most important graphic forms for each class;
 - f2. Analysis of co-occurrences for the creation of a graph to identify semantic domains;
 - f3. Identification of the most significant text segments for each class
 - f4. Analysis of concordances.

This analysis aims to identify the “lexical worlds” which synthetise the main research topics in the focus groups and some key aspects (negative and positive).

2

Textual analysis of the content of focus groups discussions

2.1

Corpus validation and preliminary observations

In the first stage, the text is pre-processed and the corpus undergoes automated *parsing and normalisation*; then follows the calculation of the main lexicometric measures as reported in Table 2, to validate the available database.

The text corpus is of considerable proportion, with a total of 313,892 occurrences (N i.e., tokens) and 12,847 different lexical items (V i.e. types). Hapaxes⁸ are 5,897. However, if we remove numeric data (which tends to increase value), numbers drop to 5,869. The total number of transcribed texts is 65. To better classify them, we subdivided fragments into as long as 40 graphic forms and obtained a total of 8,794 text segments.

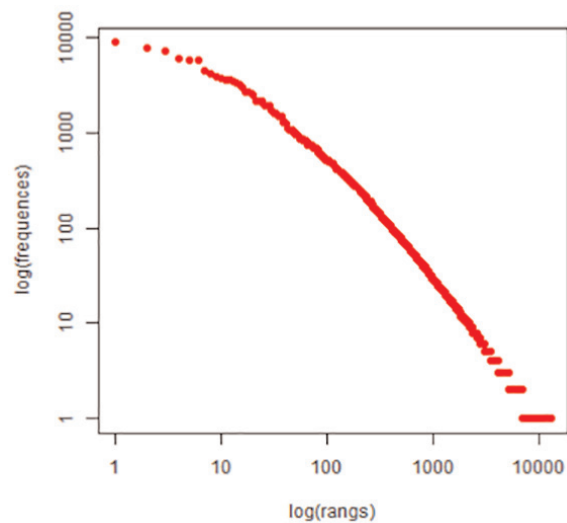
All main lexicometric measures confirm the corpus adequacy for automated testing: the Type Token Ratio is lower than the 20% threshold, a sign of adequate lexical extension; the Guiraud index is higher than the threshold value of 22 and the ZIPF index is exactly on a par with the threshold value of 1,3 confirming the corpus considerable lexical richness (Tab. 1).

Tab. 2 – Corpus lexicometric measures for the transcribed texts of 3 FG and 4 SV

| Lexicometric measures | Formulas | Values |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| TTR ⁹ | $V/N \cdot 100$ | $12.847/313.892 \cdot 100 = 4,1\%$ |
| % Hapax* | $V_1/N \cdot 100$ | $5.869/12.847 \cdot 100 = 45,7\%*$ |
| Zipf law ¹⁰ | $\frac{\log N}{\log V}$ | $\frac{\log \log 313.892}{\log \log 12.847} = \frac{12,66}{9,5} = 1,3$ |
| Guiraud index ¹¹ | $\frac{V}{\sqrt{N}}$ | $\frac{12.847}{\sqrt{313.892}} = \frac{12.847}{184,1} = 69,8$ |

* The corpus hapax number is 5,897. However, as some figures are connected to numbers which have little relevance to this study, those were eliminated from the graphic forms with a single occurrence. As a consequence, a further drop in the percentage of hapaxes, already below the 50% threshold, was recorded.

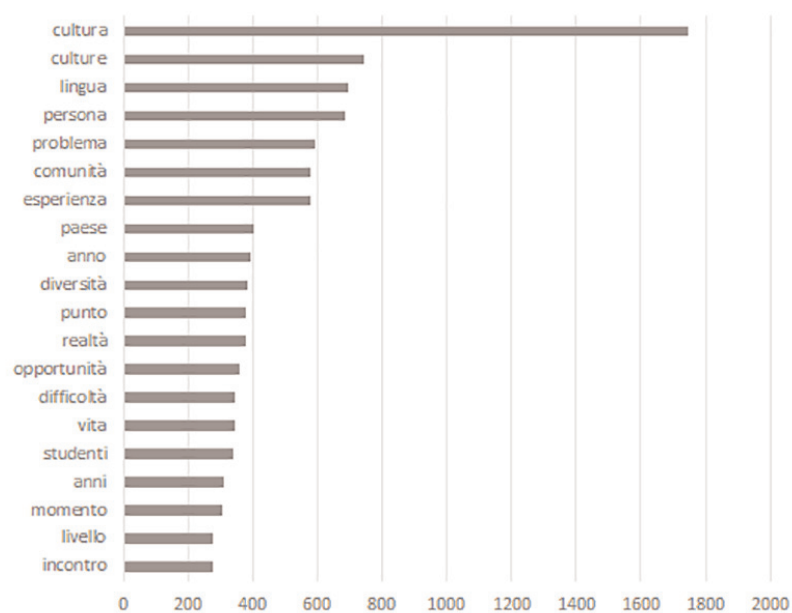
Graph. 1 – Graph representing the Zipf Law



The hapax percentage is also lower than the 50% threshold. The text was not lemmatised¹² to allow the disambiguation of homonyms.

For a general initial evaluation of the corpus, we studied the vocabulary of the main graphic forms with medium frequency occurrence, that is, the text keywords. During this stage, the first 20 most recurrent nouns, adjectives and verbs, and the first 10 adverbs were grouped together. It is no surprise, considering that this research focus is intercultural practices in multicultural educational contexts, that among the first 20 nouns the keyword was “cultura” (n. sin. *culture*), followed by a much lower number of occurrences for its plural form “culture”.

Graph. 2 – First 20 nouns out of the total vocabulary of active forms ranked in descending order of occurrence



As a start, it is crucial to define the semantic perimeter of the words “cultura” (singular) and “culture” (plural). A study of the isofrequencies, followed by the analysis of concordances, shows a different usage of the graphic form “cultura” in its singular and plural inflections. The word “cultura” refers to its socio-anthropological defi-

dition, which is the set of cultural norms, values, customs, knowledge and know-how with which members of a specific society identify. As a confirmation of this, in the FG, the word “cultura” was associated with all the different habits and customs of the people our participants engage with in academic contexts and ICL communities. For this reason, culture is associated with the words “interchange” and “dialogue”. This means that cultural diversity becomes an occasion to meet and get to know each other. In addition to this, one of the most powerful instruments of knowledge, through which diverse people meet, discuss and overcome prejudices and stereotypes – which are usually a way to oversimplify life’s complexity – is food (“cibo”). The topic of food will be examined in more detail later on, as it often emerged in focus groups’ discussions.

The Italian term “cultura”, in the singular, is connected to that of “persona” (*person*), in the sense that a more profound knowledge of another person requires overcoming cultural barriers. The idea of acceptance of another individual does not translate into mere tolerance but in an open dialogue. Using the word “cultura” in its plural form, instead, means that the word is associated with the idea of “multi” and “interculturality”. In the focus groups, participants’ diverse backgrounds and multicultural experiences in ICL communities and universities clearly demonstrate how multiculturalism can become interculturality only when people communicate regularly and share their everyday life. Interculturality requires considerable effort, but only through sincere dialogue and cultural interchange amongst different cultures is it possible to help people to see the good sides as well as the limitations of one’s own culture and that of others. Only in this way can people see beyond stereotypes and prejudices, which normally hinder all of the above.

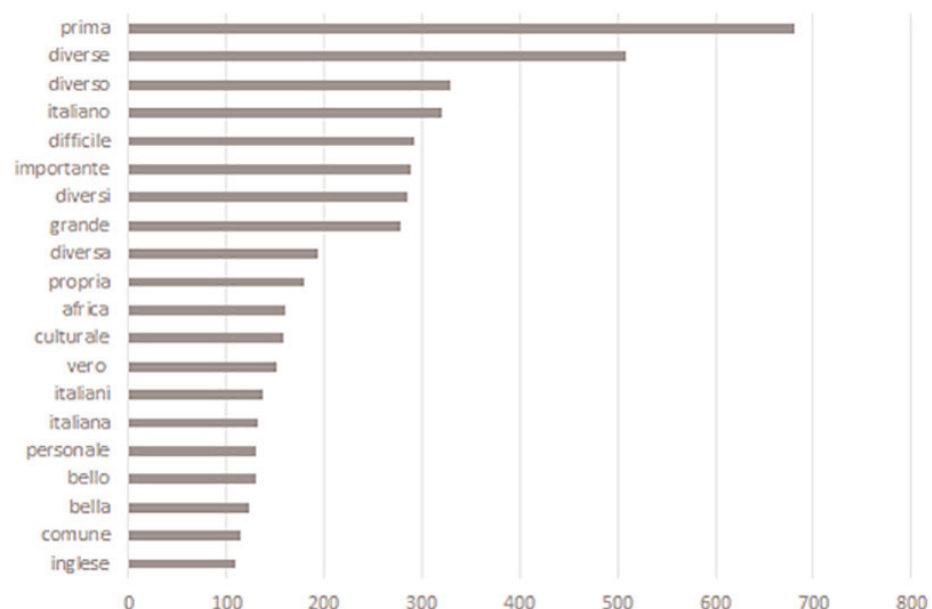
Cultural interchange requires time. The recurrent use of the word “anno” (*year*) shines a light on some of the difficulties that normally emerge at the beginning of academic or community life and that can only be overcome with time. This is why the first “anno” of university or community life is usually dedicated to language acquisition, or tackling issues which may crop up during communication breakdowns, lesson participation, talking to lecturers or peers, or while challenging oneself in meeting others and also difficulties emerging while trying to read and comprehend difficult texts. The problems that normally arise when adjusting to a new community life add to the everyday issues on one side and the necessity of acquiring a new study method on the other.

Among the *keywords* recorded, there are those used in the questions asked during the focus groups meetings: for example, “problema”, “difficoltà”, “opportunità”, “esperienza”, “comunità” and “incontro” (*problem, difficulty, opportunity, experience, community, meeting*). The analysis of concordances¹³ helped to identify different contexts in which these terms were used. The word “problema” is associated with different concepts and ideas. One is the association with the word “esperienza”, that is the experience of the multiple and varied habits and customs with which participants deal every day, but also the ignorance which often prevents people from learning about other cultures. Secondly, it is associated with the modality with which multiculturalism is managed by those who are in charge of the academic ecclesiastical institutions or the ICL communities. Thirdly, it is also associated with the lack of knowledge of the language and the effort required to read and understand difficult texts, as well as the difficulty of striking a balance between time dedicated to personal commitments and time for the community; the “difficulties” created during communication and by stereotypes and prejudices.

The Italian term “comunità” (*community*) is associated with the word “experience” of multiculturalism and interculturality. It is the place where meeting people (*incontro*) and communal living take place. Our analysis shows that, in several cases, this meeting place, the “comunità” (*community*), is humanised and therefore able to listen, welcome and understand.

Among the most frequent 20 adjectives, there is the term “prima” (*first*). The analysis of concordances shows how this term, contrarily to the automated grammatical tagging classifying it as an adjective, was mainly used as an adverb, specifically as a time conjunction or a prepositional phrase. In all of the cases, the term “prima” expresses a change process (*“processo di cambiamento”*) affecting the experience of FG participants. In their academic or ICL community experience, there is a “prima” (*before*) and a “dopo” (*after*). The word “prima” describes the time when they arrived in a different country, their first contact with the local foreign culture and an unfamiliar language. It expresses the difficulty, the fear of making mistakes, the initial surprise and struggles, and finally, the shift. All the participants pointed out how their experience in Italy allowed them to overcome prejudices and to get to know new cultures they initially perceived as distant and foreign. They also allowed them to taste new typical dishes from other countries and be exposed to dialogue and cultural interchange.

Graph. 3 – First 20 adjectives in descending order of occurrence



Conversely, when the word “prima” is used as an adjective, it is often in association with the item “cosa” (*thing*) to explain the “first thing” that they learned or surprised them upon arrival in the ICL communities or universities. In other words, it was “the first time” that a particular event occurred: women’s freedom of speech, calling adults by their first name, learning how to greet people when you first meet them, the first cultural clash. This is what we could define as “dimension” (*dimensione*) of “discovery”.

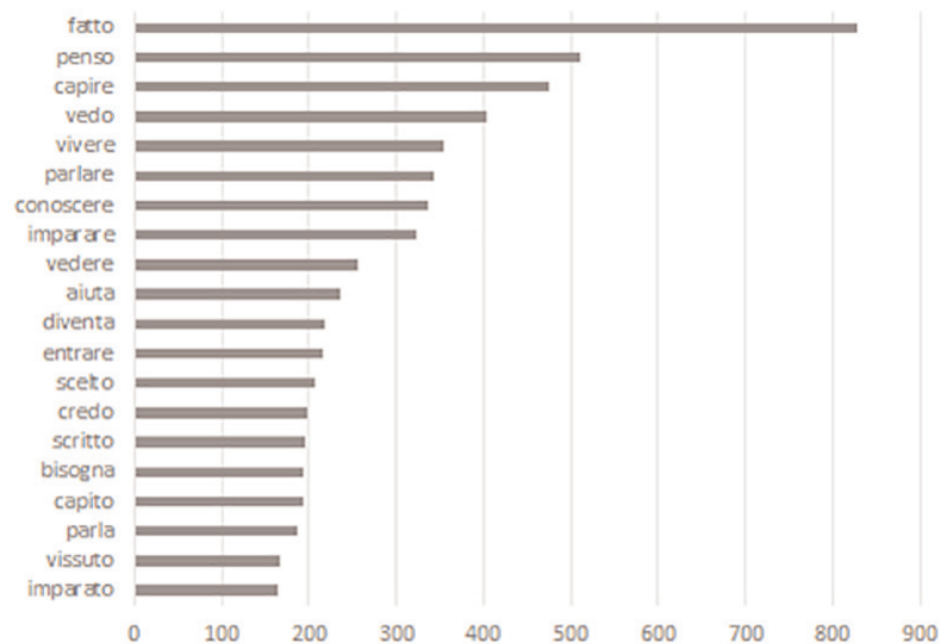
Furthermore, it is interesting to observe, through the study of isofrequencies and concordances, how the word “diverse” (feminine pl. adj.: *different*), its masculine and feminine singular inflections (*diverso* and *diversa*), and the masculine plural (*diversi*), were used. The adjective “diverse” was often associated with the word “persone”, “culture”, “realtà”, “idee” and “lingue” (*people, cultures, realities, ideas and languages*) to describe multiculturalism in religious or academic communities in which participants experienced self-awareness (*sentirsi*) and being different from others (*essere diversi*). As for lecturers and teachers, this adjective was used to describe the teaching “modality” (*modalità*) and “methodologies” (*metodologie*) used to promote interculturality in their lessons concretely. The use of singular masculine and feminine forms of these adjectives was usually associated with more specific cases referring to “a different way of thinking”, “different viewpoints”, and “different provenance”. Diversity, therefore, is a keyword in the representation of multiculturalism.

Diversity often goes hand in hand with the “difficulty” of understanding the vehicular language used during teaching and learning, Italian in this case. Being together with people from all over the world makes mutual understanding, communal living, relations and communication more “difficult”, and it also makes studying and acquisition, group involvement and exchange of ideas “difficult”. As for the teachers interviewed, the main difficulty expressed was finding an effective teaching method to meet the students’ diverse needs. This is why it becomes “important” to invest in language acquisition, to encourage “listening” (*ascolto*) and “communication” (*dialogo*); to help people become more “flexible” and learn how to “respect other cultures”, to look “beyond appearances”, “to be less self-oriented and understand others’ viewpoints”.

The importance of “food” (*cibo*) is once again a way to facilitate all of this: getting together to share some tea, water, food, helps to come into contact with another person and better disposes towards one another. In the same way, learning to call people by their names is considered “important”.

Verbs and verb forms also play a key role in the text. The most recurring verb is “fare” (*to do*) in the past participle form, and it was used to describe something completed (Graph. 4).

Graph. 4 – First 20 verbs in descending order of occurrence

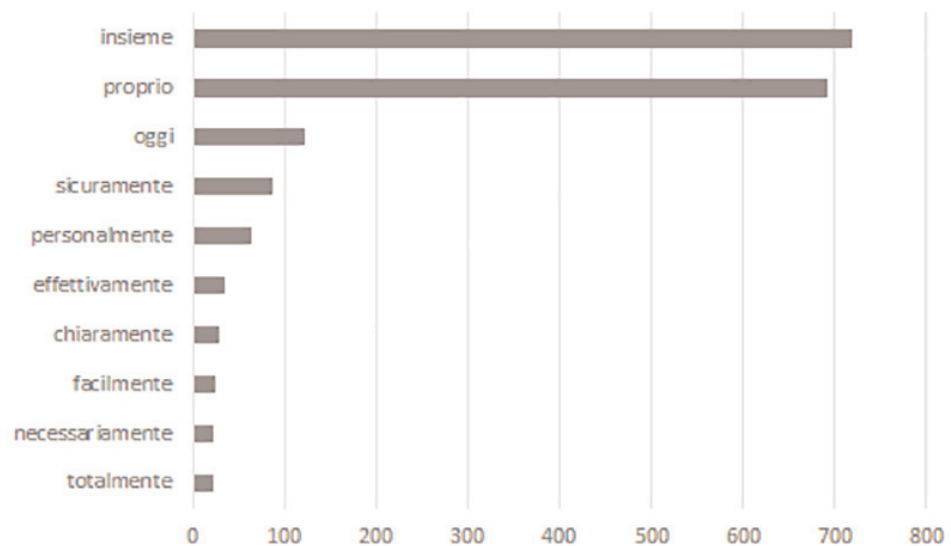


The verb “fare” (do/make) has a highly practical connotation, because, as said before, it described, for better or worse, what had been done up to that point, where things stood, and it also highlighted some concepts, because in Italian “fatto” can be translated as both “done” or “fact”, for example “the fact that we welcome others”, “the fact that we communicate”. This verb is followed by occurrences which underline aspect connected with the act of meeting others, such as the words “parlare” (*speak*) and “conoscere” (meet/get to know), but it is also associated with a time for reflection and understanding, which is expressed through the frequent appearance of verbs such as “pensare” (*think*) and “capire” (*understand*) followed by “live”, “see”, “learn” and “become”, used to describe the change that happens when meeting other people.

Finally, there is the adverbs group (Graph. 5), dominated by the term “together”, which clearly reinforces the idea of multiculturalism with expressions such as “living together”, “spend time together”, “stay together”, “make/do together”. In this respect,

it is important to remember the nature of texts analysed. Focus groups were, as already mentioned earlier in this report, members of ICL communities involved in education and training, students and lecturers of academic ecclesiastical communities and they were all invited to express their opinions and ideas, to describe their experiences of multiculturalism and interculturality. This is why the words “proprio” (*exactly, precisely, really*) and “oggi” (*today*) are frequent occurrences referring to specific contexts and/or the exact time when respondents were speaking.

Graph. 5 – First 10 adverbs in descending order of occurrence



****0001 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_F

*instead, when i arrived here, i realised that it was **truly** necessary to open up, not to be closed in myself or that they come from somewhere else, because if you behave that way, the person simply remains closed in their own culture.*

In the first explorative stage of the corpus, it is already possible to identify critical reflections, stressing how the idea of multiculturalism struggles to be translated into practice, has the following brief text illustrates:

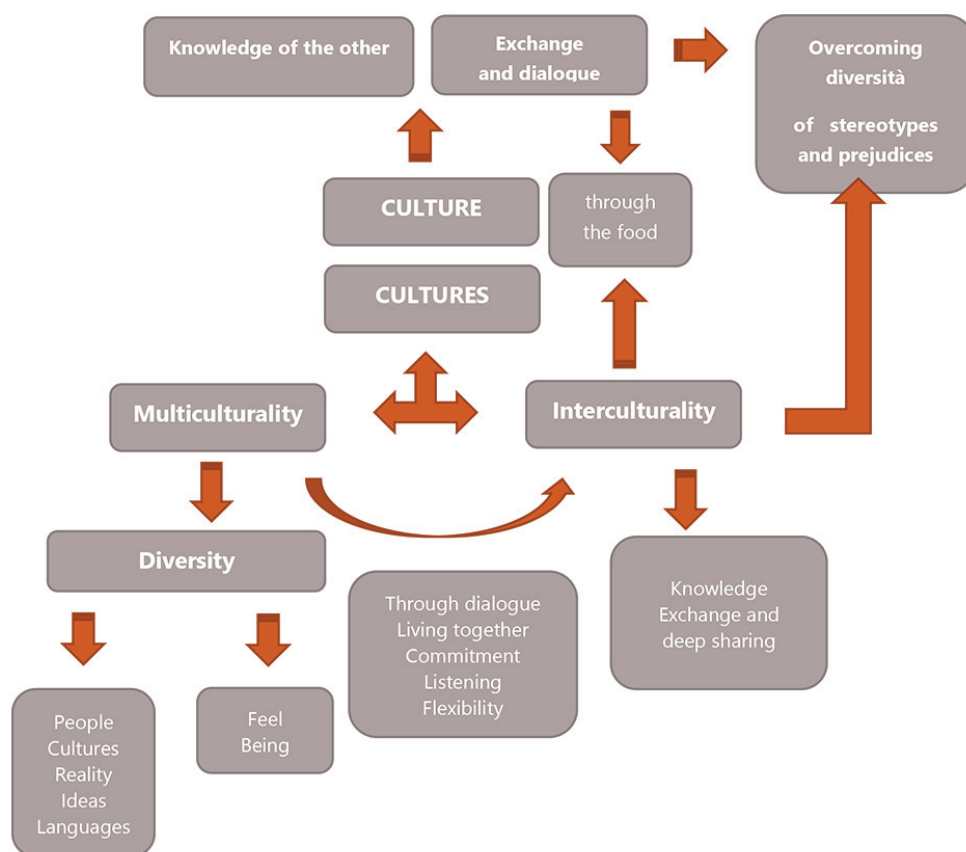
****0004 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_DOC *Sesso_MF

*this is a hypothesis of how it could work, because the academic structure the way it is **to date** does not enables intercultural processes my impression is that undoubtedly there is a respectful attitude towards multiculturalism, but they do not interconnect.*

This general analysis of the main active forms in the text corpus allows for an initial overview of its content. In the diagram below, we tried to recreate the logical connections in the text, and even if this is a preliminary stage, it can already deliver a narrative on the theme of multiculturalism and interculturality.

The central words in the diagram are “cultura” and “culture” (*culture/s*). The first concept is mainly associated with the idea of meeting another person and learning about them, cultural interchange and communication through which it is possible to overcome stereotypes and prejudices that prevent people from looking beyond appearances. The times when people share tea or typical foods from their countries become a driving force to defy barriers refraining people in these communities from deepening friendships. The highest of all barriers is language, which is defined as the main problem in the first year of university or community life.

Fig. 1 – Mind map of the entire vocabulary in the corpus



The word “culture” in its plural form, is the one mostly connected to multiculturalism and interculturality, and, more specifically, to the transition from multiculturalism and interculturality, as shown by the diagram. This transition is not an easy process; on the contrary, it is complex and demanding, and requires effort, time, listening skills and empathy. Living and doing some things together (e.g., studying and participating in group activities) helps break down cultural barriers, even between people whose origins and values are very different.

Diversity is, in fact, the distinctive trait of multiculturalism. FG participants underlined all their problems in understanding each other and spending time together, at least at the beginning of their courses. This is because the real challenges faced during the transition towards interculturality are linguistic differences, different provenance, ideas and backgrounds. This might explain why one of the first critical issues brought up during the discussion was the transitioning phase starting from the simple, peaceful acceptance of different cultures, reciprocal respect and tolerance, to fully accepting and embracing other cultures.

2.2 Presentation and discussion on the main results of the focus groups analysis

Before discussing the result of each focus group, it is important to briefly recap the topics for each meeting. The 3 focal points were:

- a) *Topic FG 1 – The perception of multiculturalism and interculturality.* In this FG we tried to pin down the participants’ understanding of the words “multiculturalism” and “interculturality” and to discuss their strengths and weaknesses;
- b) *Topic FG 2 – Experiences of cultural interchange – Intercultural education programmes.* In this FG, we tried to collect stories about the participants’ commu-

nity or academic life in multicultural contexts. Participants were asked to be specific according to their role and FG (ICL communities, University students or lecturers/teachers);

- a) *Topic FG 3 – Educational issues and specific competence*: This focus group aimed to reveal the main issues that might arise in a highly multicultural context and the necessary and most effective skills needed to best interact with people with a different language and culture.

The following observations illustrate the key concepts that emerged from discussions on the abovementioned topics, and starting with lexical analysis; we calculated our sub-corpus specificities¹⁴ for each of the three focus groups, labelled with the sort key «FG».

As mentioned in previous paragraphs, vocabulary items included not only single entries but also a series of *n-grams* identified through the analysis of repeated segments. In Graph. 6 it is possible to identify some groups of graphic forms and *n-grams* connected to important topics that emerged among and between the three groups of participants.

2.3 Specificity and semantic classification of FG n. 1

The three guiding questions asked during the focus groups are the following:

- Q1:** In your opinion, what is the difference between **multiculturality** and **interculturality**?
- Q2:** Is the context in which you are studying (academic or ICL community) a multicultural reality? When and how does this become an **opportunity**?
- Q3:** Is the context in which you are studying a multicultural reality. When and how does this become a **problem**?

To be noted that the first specific graphic items in the *sub-corpus* correspond to some key words in the abovementioned questions, and these are the words “multiculturality”, “interculturality” and “opportunity” associated with other highly specific items (Graph. 6). This derived from the fact that participants tended to repeat the keywords in the questions. For this reason, we will start commenting on the words following these first four items.

Also the keyword “problema” (*problem*) is a keyword in the guiding questions, however, it is mostly associated with the first group of specific words: “multiculturality” and “interculturality”, which are in turn connected with groups of words also containing the term “culture” (plural of “culture”) and “cultura” (singular), “identità” (identity), “ricchezza” (wealth) and “insieme” (together). This confirms the fact that respondents underlined the advantages of *multi-* and *interculturality* as well as the problems connected to them. What also emerged from the FG discussions was the importance of being “insieme” (*together*), and “ricchezza” (richness), that is the enriching experience we get from cultural diversity and the variety of customs and behaviours.

****0001 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_F

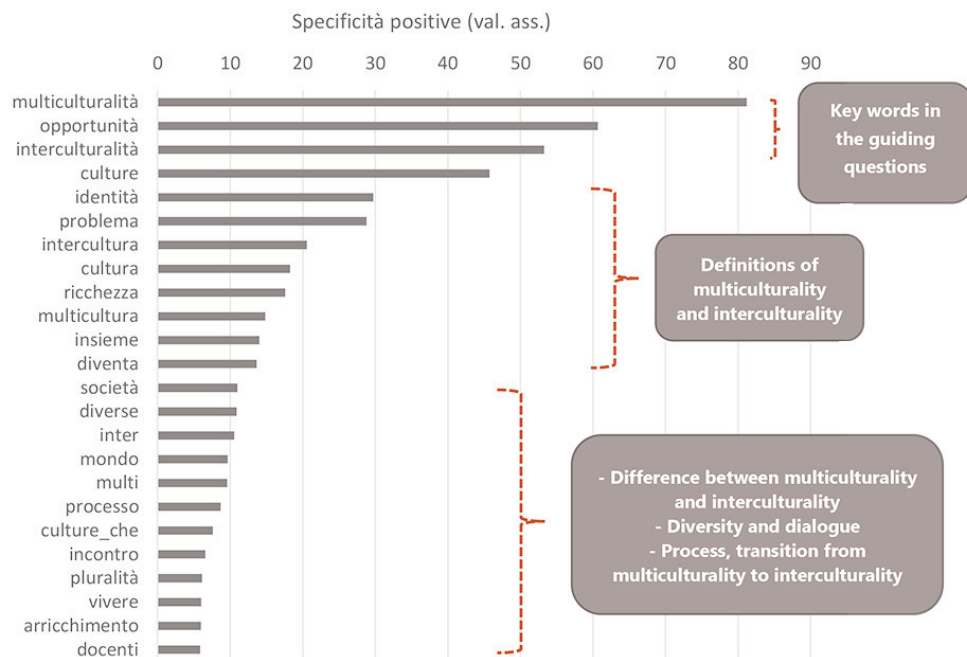
interculturality means to be open to diversity, contrarily to our tendency to be uniformed she should have done like i do the way I do it_or she should have lived like i do in this diversity there is true enrichment.

****0025 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_STUD *Sesso_F

we experience it every day but this unity brings to enrichment the moment I accept multiculturalism as unity in diversity I accept the other culture or the other person as different from me but there is something I can learn from her or him

Nevertheless, despite recognising the value of multiculturalism, participants brought up some issues usually emerging from spending time with people who keep their customs and habits without considering that of others. The scarce knowledge of other cultures might generate misunderstandings based on stereotypes and prejudices. Moreover, the partial knowledge of the language could cause communication problems and the inability to express what “a person has inside”.

Graph. 6 – List of specific graphic items and n-grams in the sub-corpus of FG n. 1



A synthesis about the “two sides of the same coin” is given by the analysis of the context and the study of concordances of the key word “opportunity”. FG participants agreed in recognising the enriching value of relationships and that interculturalism gives the opportunity to look at new horizons, learn new things, grow as a human being, communicate with people different from you and question yourself and your assumptions. However, they also highlighted the effort and the necessity to practise patience and make a great effort in actively meeting others and getting to know them.

****0011 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_STUD *Sesso_MF

*i believe there is always an **opportunity** when we are in a multicultural environment because in relationships_personal **enrichment** is generated the negative side is that you need a lot of **patience**, strong **will** and **effort**, which all require a lot of time energy and money.*

****0001 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_F

*and_so it is an **opportunity** because this allows us to **live together** and to **communicate** to open up and to **learn** from others slowly helps us enter other people’s cultures and we can give what _we have.*

The next question is: what are the differences between multiculturalism and interculturalism in the participants’ opinion? In the table below, there are some fragments which effectively synthesise the mainstream trend in the meetings.

Tab. 3 – Comparison of the definitions on “multiculturality” and “interculturality”

| Multiculturality | Interculturality |
|--|---|
| <p>****0015 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_STUD *Sesso_MF <i>multiculturality to me is the different way of living of each population while interculturality is acceptance dialogue and relationships that exist between cultures.</i></p> | <p>****0007 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_DOC *Sesso_MF <i>because probably also in this place there were people of different cultures that had to learn to live interculturality so to say that is to make diversity an opportunity to deepen relationships and knowledge of others.</i></p> |
| <p>****0008 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_DOC *Sesso_F <i>i too had this static idea when thinking about multiculturality.</i></p> | <p>****0012 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_M <i>i am convinced that speaking about interculturality is not only a question of accepting what is different but also to be involved and to come to terms with diversity.</i></p> |
| <p>****0015 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_STUD *Sesso_MF <i>from this point of view we can say that multiculturalism is a movement within and interculturality in turn is to open up the ability to embrace other people and create an inter-relation.</i></p> | <p>****0020 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_DOC *Sesso_MF <i>without ever merging, interculturality is a different process and I also follow what other people are saying that multiculturalism is the presence of different cultures together while interculturality is the relation created by the meeting and communications established among cultures.</i></p> |
| <p>****0008 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_DOC *Sesso_F <i>then I put together static because per se because on the other side I put multiculturalism that is the realisation that there are so many cultures which are in the same context.</i></p> | <p>****0018 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_DOC *Sesso_M <i>interculturality strikes me even more as a systematic construction it makes me think of a body of a group of a house – to go back to the idea of bricks and therefore to dialogue and communication as already mentioned.</i></p> |

Multiculturality and **interculturality** are associated respectively to the adjectives “statico” (static) e “dinamico” (dynamic), because multiculturalism is seen as a place where different cultures are together in the same place and context; whereas interculturality is seen as a “process in which people try to establish a dialogue, to relate to others. “Relationship” (*relazione*) is the distinctive element of interculturality, while “acceptance” of diversity is multiculturalism typical trait. The presence of different cultures in the same place does not necessarily imply that they are willing to communicate with and get to know each other. Furthermore, there is a typical process to go through when transitioning from multiculturalism to interculturality, highlighted by the third group of words in this FG, in which it is possible to notice the prefixes “multi” and “inter” (Graph. 6). The first is connected to multiplicity and diversity encountered in religious or academic communities; the second is “interaction” which is achieved through “relationships” (*relazione*). When participants use both these words, they want to stress the personal enrichment that comes from diversity, dialogue, coexistence, and not the mere sum (*sommatoria*) of different cultural identities.

****0015 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_STUD *Sesso_MF
*without being only what we are but knowing we are all united I started from the words themselves in the sense that **multi** means a lot that there is cultural diversity because otherwise we cannot talk about the many.*

******0008 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_DOC *Sesso_F**

In the practical sense interculturality instead as the term itself says inter explains the relationship _one should be aware of it and create occasions to exchange, meet and interact.

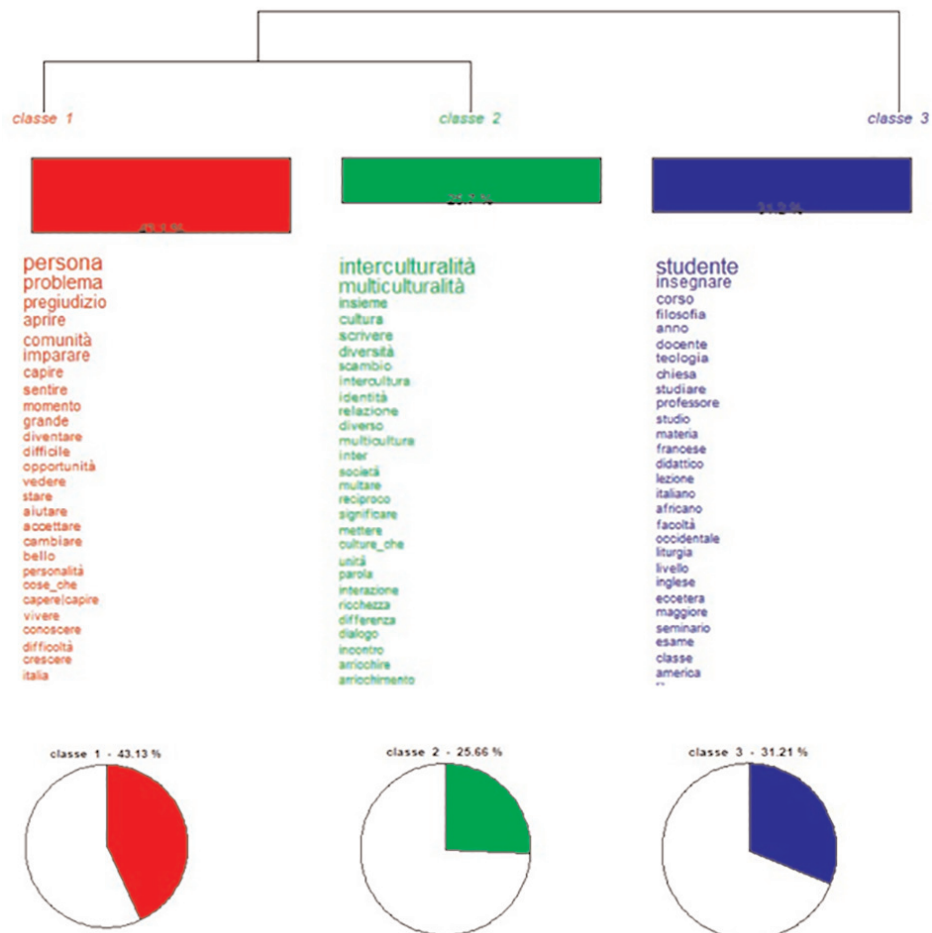
Even though the study of specificities allows us to identify the key words in the FG' discussion, we applied a classification technique appropriate for the topic extraction procedure to identify the so-called lexical worlds hidden in the text. More specifically, the method used is called Reinért, and it is based on an algorithm for divisive hierarchical clustering, particularly suitable for text classification. The analysis was conducted on the text segments of the corpus and lemmatised (1983; 1986; 1991)¹⁵. The following are some validation measures used for classification:

| | |
|--|--|
| # texts: 25 | # text segments: 3.679 |
| # forms: 8.289 | # occurrences: 131.363 |
| # lemmas: 5.207 | # active forms: 4.683 |
| # added forms: 454 | # active forms with frequency >= 3: 1809 |
| Mean number of modules per segment: 35.7 | # classes: 3 |

3.332 classified segments on 3.679 (90,57%)

As the table shows, 90.57% of segments were classified, a result that is sufficiently above the threshold level of 70/75%. There were 3 groups identified, as the dendrogram below shows, and the distinctive segments are evenly distributed among them (Graph. 7).

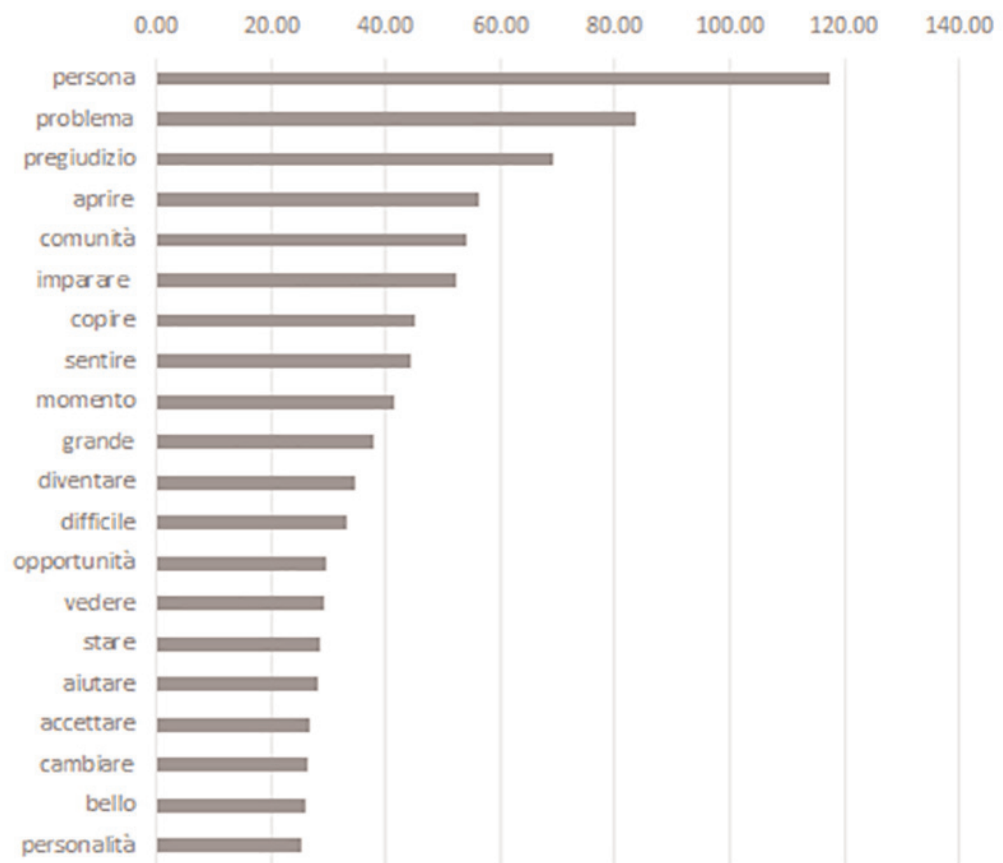
Graph. 7 – Dendrogram about the classification of the 3 topics extracted from FG corpus and the identifying words for each cluster – val.% segments classified for each cluster



2.3.1 The first cluster of FG1: the individual dimension and community experience of multiculturalism, a bridge towards interculturality. Problems and opportunities.

To identify the specific topics in this first cluster, it is necessary to analyse the context in which words are used, together with co-occurrences graphs. This way, the meaning of these words is connected to that derived from the network of their connections. Among the first 10 words there is the lemma “*persona*” which possesses a central role in the class. Participants have underlined, in fact, the importance of considering the “person” to overcome “problems” which may arise from the coexistence of different cultures and “prejudices”, which are serious problems when living together. Other barriers to coexistence are individual “personalities”, with their virtues and faults, simple “gestures” and general attitude.

Graph. 8 – Lemmas of words in cluster 1 for chi2 test value



Please note: p-value < 0,0001

The kind of diversity deriving from multiculturalism can become a “great opportunity” to “learn” new things, “understand”, and “change” one’s point of view and that of those who are different. This cluster is particularly full of verb forms indicating openness towards others (Tab. 4). It is no coincidence that the lemma “to open” is the first in the list of cluster keywords, followed by the verbs “to learn”, “to understand” and “to feel”. This suggests that opening to other people and cultures helps with “being” and “living” together, accepting others, especially when living in a “community”.

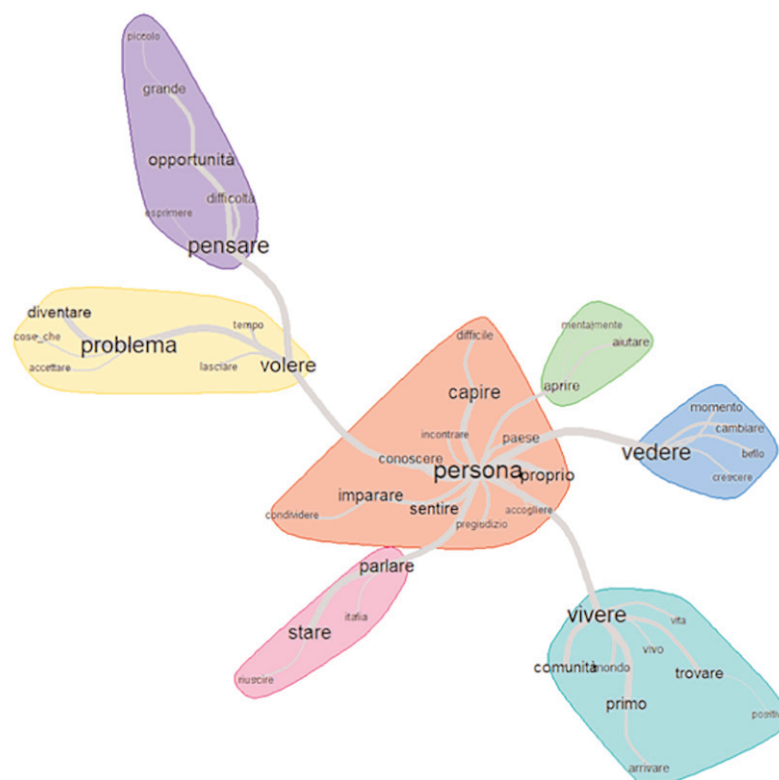
Tab. 4 – First 10 nouns, verbs and adjectives of cluster 1 of FG1

| Nouns | Verbs | Adjectives/Adverbs |
|-------------|-----------|--------------------|
| persona | aprire | grande |
| problema | imparare | difficile |
| pregiudizio | capire | bello |
| comunità | sentire | aperto |
| momento | diventare | vivo |
| opportunità | vedere | attento |
| personalità | stare | normale |
| difficoltà | aiutare | migliore |
| gesto | accettare | vero |
| sfida | cambiare | piccolo |

To this end, it may be useful to observe some repeated segments (*n-grams*) which shed light on the experience of living together with people who have “their own way of doing things”, “their own way of looking at things”, “their own way of thinking”, “their own way of living”, with different “points of view”. Moreover, variety is seen as a source of knowledge (“I learned many things”) and growth but also a source of “difficulties”. Some “difficulties” are more connected to daily activities, for example, studying. Language difficulties can be, especially at the beginning, a real “challenge” requiring time to be tackled and overcome.

The above paragraph is synthetically represented in the Graph. below, where some lexical regions are highlighted because some words occur with a different frequency than others.

Graph. 9 – Graph with co-occurrences of lemmas for cluster 1 – Lexical regions



The word in the middle of the graph is the graphic form for “persona”, where the closest region meets the main verb forms of the cluster: “understand” (*capire*), “learn” (*imparare*) and “feel” (*sentire*). “Capire” is sided by the adjective “difficile”; next to “imparare” features “to share”. It derives that multiculturalism creates the conditions for people with different cultural backgrounds to learn about each other’s habits and share ideas, things and space.

The Graph shows 6 lexical regions connected to the central one through lemmas and verbs: “to see” (*vedere*), “to be/to talk” (*stare/parlare*), “to open” (*aprire*), “to live” (*vivere*), “to want” (*volere*) and “to think” (*pensare*). Multiculturalism creates the condition where one can “see” the other person and their differences and offers the opportunity to “change” (*cambiare*) and “grow”. Moreover, it is an occasion for “opening the mind” and for reflection; a “moment” to “think” to how to transform “difficulties” into “opportunities”. However, it is also a source of “problems”, because there are “things that” are difficult to “accept” and require “time”.

****0012 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_M

*but then you can't yes you **see the other** person but you can never **really understand** if you do not **live** or do not have an experience and go beyond your own culture and really see the **person** you will never **get to know that person**.*

****0012 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_M

*And this is also when you see somebody you must try to go beyond certain prejudices and labels and **to see the person** this in general the path the future of humanity should be this acceptance of a person for what it is.*

****0021 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_STUD *Sesso_MF

*so in my opinion **diversity helps us to feel enriched** and not to judge and to respect diversity because we are limited we were speaking about tolerance for example there is an African culture for example where **people** cut themselves in a rite of passage.*

****0012 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_M

*yes i would say that maybe what helps us the most to **face this challenge** is that we arrive with an aim in mind when i first came i expected to **meet people who were different**.*

****0001 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_F

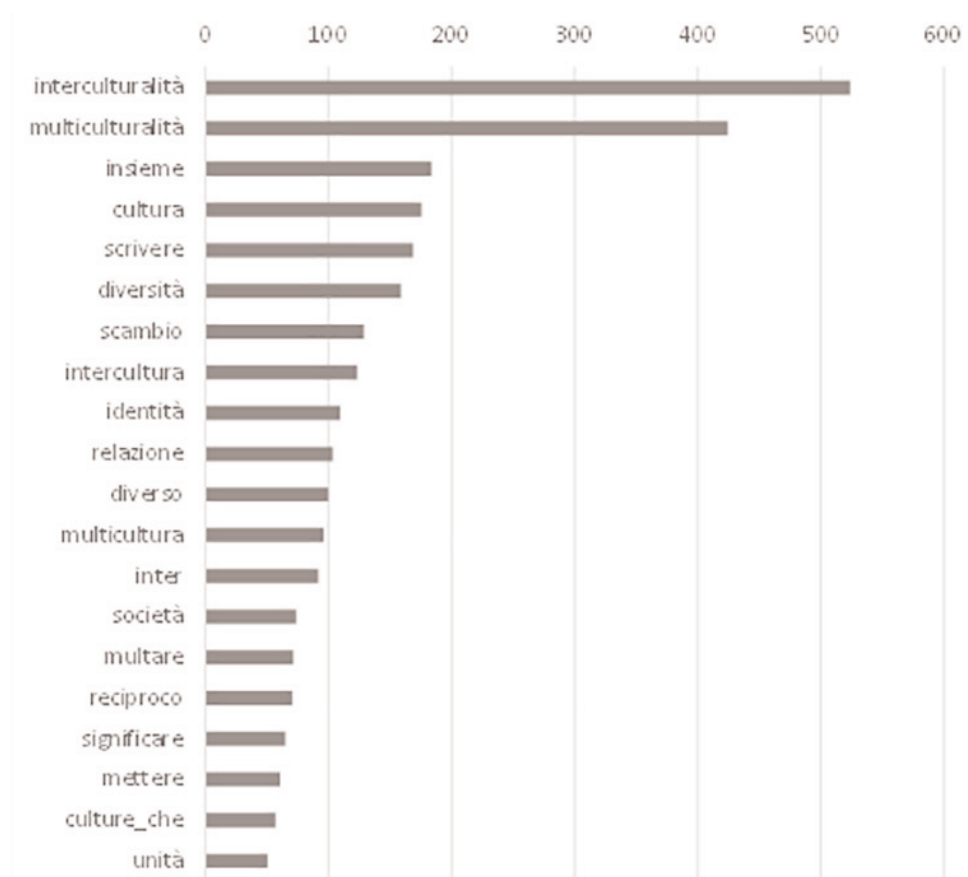
*when **you welcome a person** is also a way to meet this **person opens up** and tell you the wonderful things they do helping others **becomes an opportunity** for growth in the community if i may add yes **it is an opportunity***

2.3.2 Second cluster for FG1: Concepts of interculturality and multiculturalism

As in the previous cluster, it is necessary to observe the specific words for this class (Graph. 10) and their connection networks, by interpreting the lexical regions in the graph on co-occurrences.

The focal topic for this cluster is the definition of *interculturality* and *multiculturalism* and the comparison between the two. As Table 5 shows, in fact, the first two typical nouns in the cluster are exactly the two keywords *interculturality* and *multiculturalism*, followed by two verbs describing the actions performed in the FG, which are “to write” (*scrivere*) and “to mean” (*significare*): the first for when participants were asked to write on a piece of paper the meaning of the two key words; the latter was used by respondents to introduce their point of view on the topic.

Graph. 10 – Characteristic words in cluster 2, for chi2 value



Please note: p-value<0,0001

******0013 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_MF**

*but to have interculturality first we need multiculturality in my opinion multiculturality is many cultures together in a country or state interculturality for example is the rainbow a synthesis of the union the way i see it multiculturality **i wrote** many cultures all together no.*

******0021 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_STUD *Sesso_MF**

*first towards myself than towards the other person that is different from me and who may not necessarily be like me so **I wrote** plurality within interculturality based on the fact that plurality brings forth what should firstly be together.*

******0014 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_F**

*i can't explain it in so many words but it is very simple **multiculturalism means** many different cultures from different countries and different cities but **interculturality** is much deeper it **means** many multiculturalities together a commitment many multiculturalities and many cultures is about quantity that is different values and different countries while interculturality is about the quality of cultural exchange.*

Using their daily experience, FG participants tried to pinpoint what are the distinctive features of *inter-* and *multi-*culturalism. They confirm once again the idea that “multiculturalism” is a specific context in which different cultures coexist, “are together”, co-present. This shows that multiculturalism has a static nature, confirmed by

some of the fragments above, whereas interculturality has dialogic and relational connotations. Interculturality is different from multiculturalism since it implies individual and collective effort in creating a relationship, sharing experiences and understanding the other person and making each other's lives richer.

****0001 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_F

*i can only say that the difference between **multiculturalism** and interculturality is that **multiculturalism** is **the presence of different cultures together for example here we are doing multicultural meetings**.*

****0001 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_F

*but **interculturality** let's say we **start a dialogue** and try to **enrich each other and share** out life which is an asset what we share in a life together yes I am only repeating what you have already said.*

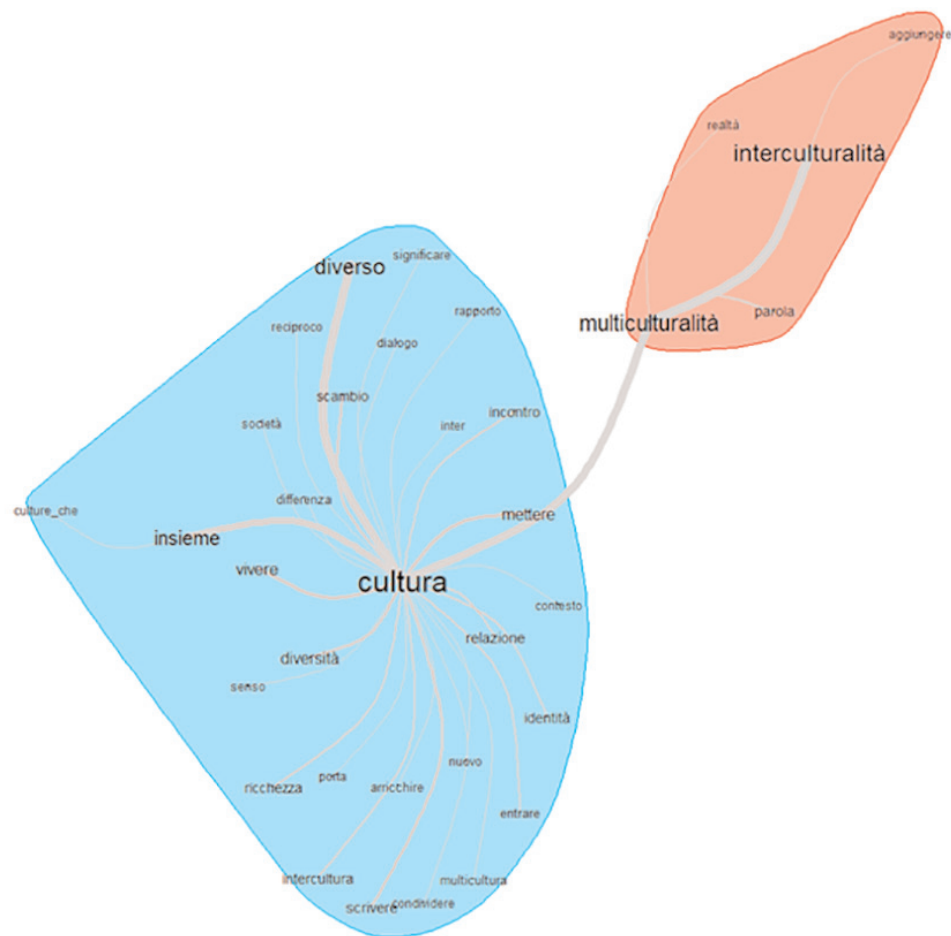
However, the pivotal point of the discussion was the concept of “cultura” (*culture*). As it is noticeable in the co-occurrences Graph of this cluster (Graph. 11), the largest semantic region is around the word “culture”, associated to many other words and verb forms to describe the variety and “diversity” among people with different backgrounds (*identità*: identities), and also connected to “dialogue”, “relationship”, “interchange” facilitated by living together and sharing life experiences (e.g., studying).

Tab. 5 – First 10 nouns, verbs and adjectives for cluster 2 of FG1

| Nouns | Verbs | Adjectives/Adverbs |
|------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| interculturalità | scrivere | diverso |
| multiculturalità | significare | insieme |
| cultura | mettere | reciproco |
| diversità | arricchire | statico |
| scambio | esistere | terzo |
| intercultura | unire | continuo |
| identità | riconoscere | reciprocamente |
| relazione | definire | comune |
| multicultura | appartenere | distinto |
| società | isolare | temporale |

The relationships between different “cultures” become a “continuous” and “reciprocal” source of personal enrichment (“arricchire” = to enrich). The co-occurrences graph seems to suggest that *multi-* and *interculturality* are the result of a process in which different cultures and their internal dynamics are involved. In this respect, participants demonstrated to have a clear idea of what both concepts are about and the commitment required to try to overcome the simplistic vision of multiculturalism, which is simply about cultural coexistence and reciprocal tolerance. On the contrary, the experience of interculturality is about sharing, exchanging, communicating with each other, understanding and really listening to one another.

Graph. 11 – Characteristic words in cluster 2, for chi2 value



2.3.3 Third cluster for FG1: The experience of multi- and interculturality in the academic context. The lecturers' experience

The synthesis for this third cluster provides an interesting *insight* into the academic life of FG1 participants, with a particular focus on the lecturers' experience. The analysis of characteristic words (Graph. 12) together with the co-occurrences graph (Graph. 13) shows the group's cluster words. First of all, the most common nouns were "student", "course" and "philosophy", while the verbs were "to teach" and "to study" (Tab. 6). This is obviously due to the fact that teachers refer to their experience of multiculturalism and the challenges connected to it and in this way, they offered a broad description of their relationship with "students", "teaching", "language difficulties" they had not only with students but also with colleagues.

Therefore, the central theme for this cluster is the lecturers' discussions on multiculturalism. Students are at the centre of this discussion, as it is visible in Graph. 13, and it is around them that their lecturers' stories revolve.

One of the most problematic traits regards students' language varieties and the fact that most lessons are taught in Italian. Students come from every part of the world, but mainly from African or Asian countries, and have issues with following courses and studying. The most common first languages are French and English, but also Spanish and German.

******0010 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_DOC *Sesso_MF**

*and so the possibility to speak **spanish french english german**.*

The lecturers' difficulties lie in the fact that they need to adapt the course content to make it accessible to an audience that knows very little Italian, and explain concepts that are also quite complex. Secondly, they need to adapt the teaching material to help and support students' learning.

******0017 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_DOC *Sesso_MF**

*instead i think that for me the most difficult thing is that of trying to **modify** my plan and its **contents** because luckily or unfortunately in italy 90% of texts are translations and i can find the **original in english or french**.*

To overcome these difficulties, lecturers and teachers try to provide texts in the original language, even if this will make the students' final delivery phase, during assessments, more complex, because exams are in Italian. In some fragments, lecturers underline the necessity to rethink how courses can be reorganised to solve the significant language difficulties students and teachers face.

******0018 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_DOC *Sesso_M**

*instead there are the english and also the french predicting needs i think it is one of the first things also temporarily to manage the problem to **prevent the problem and offer courses** also in english.*

“Philosophy” and “theology” are two disciplines around which some of the most important reflections revolve. They discuss whether adopting an intercultural approach to teaching and not merely a multicultural one, should be the responsibility of academic institutions.

******0018 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_DOC *Sesso_M**

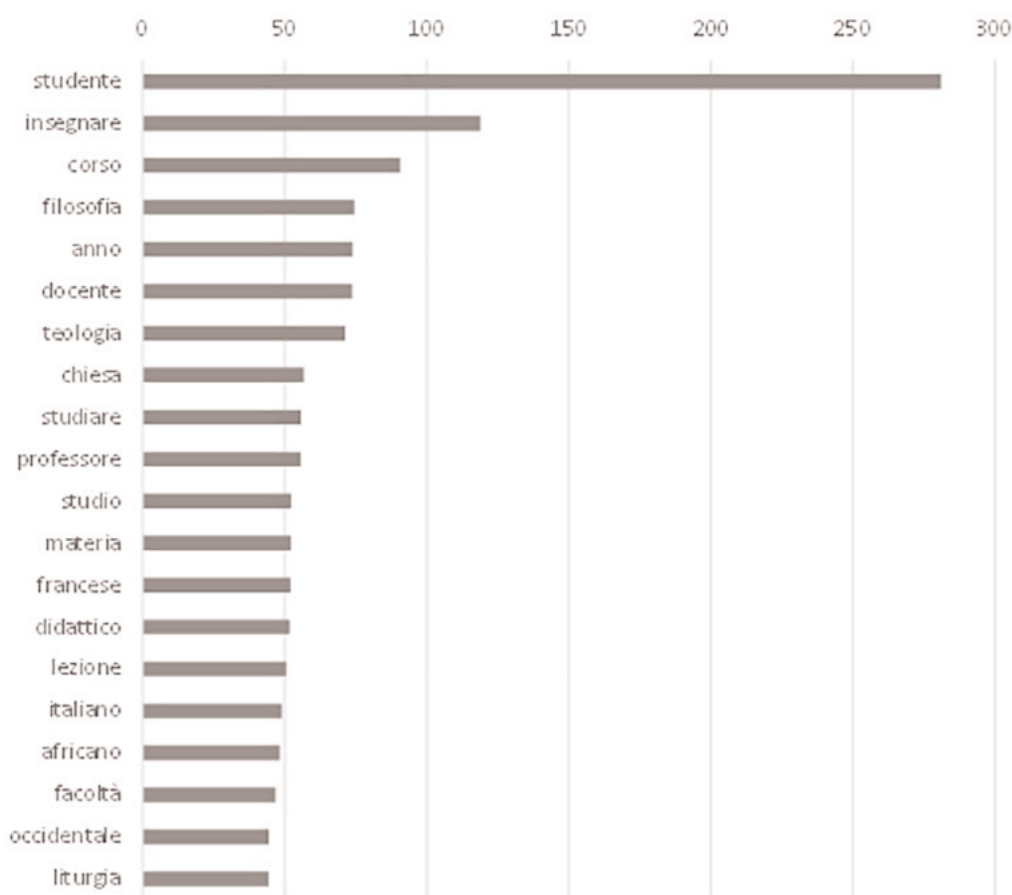
*first of all i would like to say that we always face the temptation we all have and here i am speaking in my capacity as a **member of the faculty of philosophy** that is the temptation to have an **approach_ that is only multicultural and not intercultural**.*

******0004 *FG_fg1 *TipCom_DOC *Sesso_MF**

*because as **trinitarian theology professors** here in rome we are reflecting on the **teaching system and methodology** of trinitarian theology for **people with so many different cultures** and_so we are trying to find a way to train and I am not saying that we are carrying out research but we are at least starting to think about it together from_an educational perspective.*

The risk is that of offering courses on disciplines approaching certain topics predominantly from a “western” cultural perspective or with specific backgrounds in mind, such as Chinese, Indian, or African philosophy, without even attempting to use an intercultural approach to these disciplines. The final question is to establish whether interculturality should be a responsibility of academic institutions.

Graph. 12 – Characteristic words in cluster 3, for chi2 value



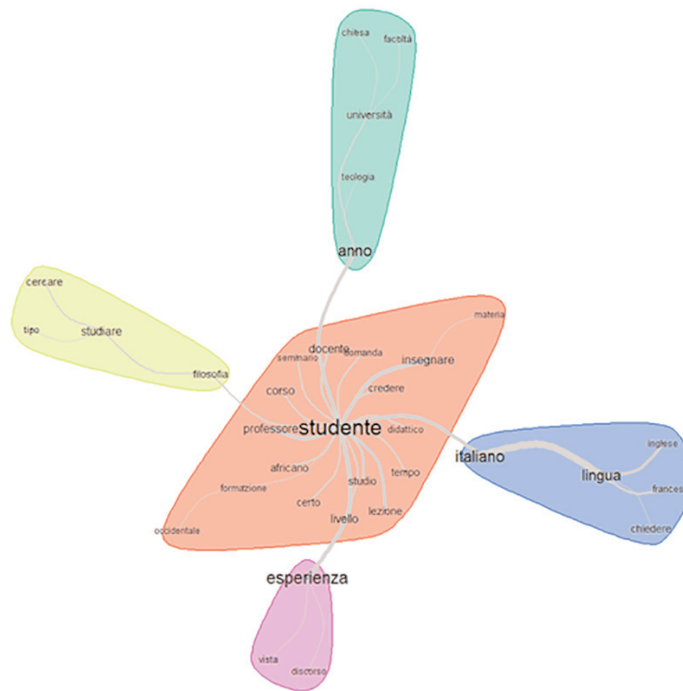
Please note: * p-value<0.0001

However, the teacher's commitment to the "proposal" of texts and readings is crucial in order to to "simplify" the students' studying and acquisition process. Teachers, in fact, try to meet the student's needs (*"rispondere"*) and requests in order to make them "interested" in the study subjects (tab 6).

Tab. 6 – First 10 nouns, verbs and adjectives for cluster 3 of FG1

| Nouns | Verbs | Adjectives/Adverbs |
|------------|--------------|--------------------|
| studente | insegnare | francese |
| corso | studiare | didattico |
| filosofia | leggere | italiano |
| anno | proporre | africano |
| docente | rispondere | occidentale |
| teologia | seguire | inglese |
| chiesa | semplificare | maggiore |
| professore | funzionare | formativo |
| studio | interessare | continuamente |
| materia | ritenere | linguistico |

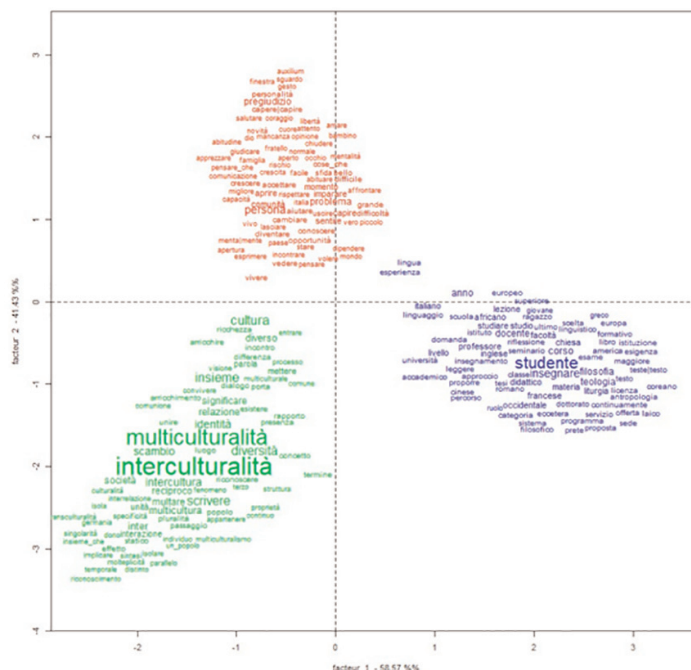
Graph. 13 – Co-occurrences graph for the graphic forms of cluster 3 – Semantic regions



2.3.4 Overview

The Graph below shows the typical lemmas of each cluster represented on the factorial plan. Along the first factorial axis, the second (green) and third (blue) cluster meet, allowing us to identify the factorial dimension starting from the more general definitions of *multi-* and *inter-*culturalism, and ending with the teacher’s specific experiences regarding the academic context, but also teaching and acquisition. Along this axis, theoretical definitions are always opposed to practical experience (red cluster), which confirms that there are problems and opportunities deriving from the co-existence of people with diverse cultural backgrounds and identities.

Graph. 14 – Factorial plan projection of the word clouds for cluster 3



2.4 Specificities and semantic classification in FG2

The following questions are the guiding questions used during focus groups. In this case, they were changed according to respondents' different life contexts, which means that questions wording changes according to whether the question is asked to members of the ICL community or academic ecclesiastical institutions. Another differentiation is based on whether the questions address teachers or students.

Questions for members of the ICL communities:

- **Q1:** In the multicultural educational context in which you live, you interact with people who are culturally different from you. **Give us some examples** from your experience of interacting with people from a different culture.
- **Q2:** Thinking about your own learning experience in this context, what are the **proposals** of those who manage this community to encourage multicultural and intercultural interactions and awareness? **Describe** them briefly.
- **Q3:** How do you rate the **proposals** listed? Give your evaluation.
- **Q4:** If you could **propose** something different, what would it be?

Questions for members of academic ecclesiastic institutions: LECTURERS

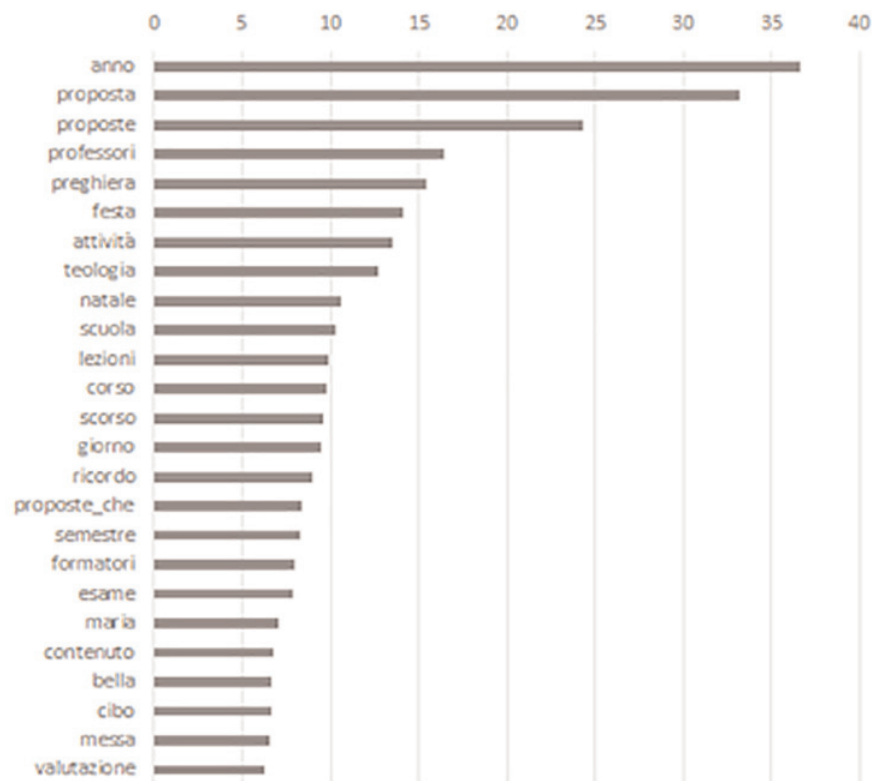
- **Q1:** In the multicultural educational context where you work, you interact with people who are culturally different from you. **Give us some examples** from your experience of interacting with people from a different culture.
- **Q2:** We are in a multicultural educational context. How does this change your curriculum (lesson content, language, lecture material and bibliographies for exams)? **Proposals.**
- **Q3:** How do you rate the **proposals** listed? Give your evaluation.
- **Q4:** If you could **propose** something different, what would it be?

Questions for members of academic ecclesiastic institutions: STUDENTS

- **Q1:** In the multicultural educational context you study, you interact with people who are culturally different from you. **Give us some examples** from your experience of interacting with people from a different culture.
- **Q2:** We are in a multicultural educational context. How does this change your curriculum (lesson content, language, lecture material and bibliographies for exams)? **Proposals.**
- **Q3:** How do you rate the **proposals** listed? Give your evaluation.
- **Q4:** If you could **propose** something different, what would it be?

We report all the questions because, as already mentioned in the previous FG1 text analysis, the first graphic forms specific to their *subcorpus* correspond to some keywords in the questions. These are the words “proposta” and “proposte”¹⁶ (*proposal/s*) associated with higher specificity values, such as the word “anno” (*year*), used to describe current and past experiences (*nell'ultimo anno, nel corso del primo anno, negli ultimi anni, nei primi due anni: the past year, in my first year, over the past years, in the first two years*) (Graph. 15).

Graph. 15 – List of the graphic forms and n-grams specific to the FG2 sub-corpus



However, to better understand the content of FG discussions concerning the different roles of their participants, it is preferable to comment on the specificity of the FG2 sub-corpus depending on whether they are lecturers/teachers, students or ICL members. The following table shows a list of the specific graphic forms for each group of participants.

Tab. 7 – FG2 sub-corpus specificities for the “Tipocom” variable: teachers/lecturers, students and ICL members

| FG2: teachers | FG2: students | FG2: ICL members |
|----------------|---------------|------------------|
| docente | professori | comunità |
| studenti | università | proposta |
| eccetera | professore | proposte |
| tesi | teologia | vivere |
| insegnamento | facoltà | formatori |
| discorso | scuola | vita |
| insegnò | lezioni | casa |
| fonti | lezione | comunitaria |
| maria | corsi | interculturalità |
| immagine | <i>mate</i> | crescere |
| sfida | missiologia | preghiera |
| contenuti | urbaniana | cena |
| testo | filosofia | giorno |
| studente | anno | formazione |
| punto di vista | lingue | gruppi |
| studentessa | corso | gruppo |
| esigenza | amicizia | insieme |
| sintesi | pausa | formatore |
| Gesù | esame | confratelli |
| testi | finito | cane |

What is apparent from the analysis of the **FG with teachers** is their multicultural experience derived from their rapport with students and other colleagues (*docenti*). Considering that the average level of education in this group is high, it is surprising how often the word “etcetera” appears, even to end very brief lists (often a single word), as if to draw the reasoning to an end rapidly. This is also more evident after the analysis of concordances, as a warning of all the criticalities of analysed texts. In this FG, in fact, the topic of multiculturalism underpins all discussions, while interculturality is barely touched upon. As for the relationship with other colleagues, what surfaced from texts was the difficulty in understanding each other and the opportunity to be enriched by being together and discussing how to structure courses, methodologies and how to explain some of the contents. Diversity seems to be accepted as a matter of fact; FG2 participants see themselves as increasingly international “teaching staff” (*corpo docente*), due to professors’ different origins. However, the relationship is instrumental to the ultimate goal of how to best organise their own teaching. There is no sign of intending to live (*vivere*), interculturality with colleagues and students.

When studying their rapport with students, it is clear that multiculturalism presents some real “challenges” (*sfide*). The first and most significant problems are the organisation and running of their teaching and the different modalities to adopt when supervising students’ “dissertations” (*tesi*), considering that many students are unfamiliar with dissertation writing altogether. Another issue is the selection of “sources” necessary to study some topics in depth. To this end, teachers proposed several different solutions, such as “reading and commenting” “sources” in class; searching for “sources” in the original “language” to compensate for the undeniable problems deriving from students’ limited knowledge of Italian, at least in the first year of university (despite the availability of Italian language courses). Multiculturalism presents them with the “challenge” of transferring knowledge of some “contents”, such as the image of Mary and Jesus himself, which, in this case, are not so much connected to linguistic competence but mostly to different cultural backgrounds, and the approaches used in students’ places of origin to explain the same topics.

As regards the **students’ FG2**, the *sub-corpus* for this group shows the prevalent reference to the teaching staff, represented by the “professori” (professors/lecturers/teachers). In most fragments, students seem to recognise that professors paid particular “attention” and “sensitivity” towards **multiculturalism**, by adapting their teaching methods and communication styles. In addition, there is the added challenge of diversity amongst teaching staff, as many of them have different cultural backgrounds. This aspect was often emphasised, as the “Urbaniana” University is regarded as a model of “universal academia”. The students’ “choice” of this and other pontifical universities seems to be due to multiculturalism and the opportunities offered by meeting people from different parts of the world. Furthermore, in the text fragments, the word “università” is often used to refer to the organisation of “faculties” and “courses”, and in particular to the “facoltà di teologia pastorale” (Pastoral Theology Faculty) and the “theology” and “missiology” courses. These are the kinds of teaching on which students’ discussions focused, because, to some extent, they are the *thematic perimeter* within which “interculturality” is created. The key point is the comparison between “western theology” and other “theologies”, particularly the “eastern” one (Indian, Chinese), but also African theology. The knowledge of different theologies is considered fundamental by pastoral staff. At the same time, some students disagree and believe that it is important to study more in-depth only the theology of the place where they will be working.

The important question is: what are the concrete places where interculturality is created? From the analysis of fragments, we identified two spaces: a **formal** and an **informal** one. The formal context in which interculturality happens is “lessons” (*lezioni*): a place where the western culture and other cultures “exchange”, meet, dialogue and discuss.

****0044 *FG_fg2 *TipCom_STUD *Sesso_MF

*so in the **lessons** we try to **let all cultures interact to show us a new concept** not only from the italian perspective therefore european but also other perspectives so i hear this very often also from the teachers.*

Some teachers, in fact, use a traditional teaching methodology, mostly teacher-centered, while others use new ways of teaching, more suitable for favoring interaction among students and between students and teachers.

****0036 *FG_fg2 *TipCom_STUD *Sesso_MF

*and also to be able to experience the **lesson** in ways which are different there are **some professors who teach traditional lecture-style lessons** while others use other methods for example **lessons sitting in circle** we are in italy and the approach is european but at least there is openness.*

The informal context is what happens during “breaks” (*pause*) between lessons or during parties organised by the academic institutions before the start of the semester to encourage networking (*feste*). From a series of fragments, we noticed a particular stress on the powerful cultural ritual of drinking “*mate*”, a typical Latin American tradition, to meet people and build friendships. Numerous participants stressed how sharing “*mate*” does not merely mean drinking something together, but it means building a friendship.

****0040 *FG_fg2 *TipCom_STUD *Sesso_MF

*also trying i like drinking **mate** i understood the meaning of mate because for example in argentina sharing mate is not just sharing something you like oh i like drinking mate because it is a nice tea no but also to **create friendships** that is when i **share mate** this creates a friendship and a meaning i did not know before because for us if we share a coca cola it is ok.*

This paragraph analyses the typical features identified in the fragments of the FG with members of the **ICL community**. In this group, it becomes clearly evident how interculturality plays a more crucial role. For seminarians and sisters from different countries, community life is not only a privileged environment where they meet people but also a place of “conflict” (*scontro*). Consequently, multiculturalism and interculturality seemed to be significant commitments in the communities interviewed. Living together is a source of inner wealth (“*ricchezza*”, literary translated *wealth*) but also hard work (*fatica*), as already anticipated in the previous FG1 fragments. However, this complexity is an aspect deserving of attention and effort for the FG communities. Participants called attention to the necessity of agreeing on initiatives connected to interculturality proposed to seminarians. Sisters, in fact, insisted on the need for more training in communication and listening skills.

****0028 *FG_fg2 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_M

*my **proposal** is that when tutors propose something i hear words in the corridors but tutors know that too **it would be nice if promoters as a team also asked for the seminarians' opinion.***

The two pivotal points around which intercultural activities are created are “**prayers**”, adoration and meditation, and **festive occasions** (*festa*).

Women’s ICL communities offer a wealth of shared initiatives to encourage socialisation, the most remarkable being the **celebration of May 1st** (“*fiesta del primo maggio*”) a day when every sister is invited to prepare some traditional “food” from their country and share the traditional way of preparing it. The experience is not, therefore,

limited to sharing food, which in itself is already an instrument of cross-cultural understanding. This is the added value of this initiative, **food** as a powerful communication tool, with the added value of knowledge transfer. The aim is not to share something I learned in the past but to learn something belonging to another sister's life and habits.

******0026 *FG_fg2 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_F**

*so this **may the first celebration** when every person prepares their own traditional **food** then the others come and take a piece of mine is like as if the idea is that maybe one day i would be able to prepare an american dish for example because in my congregation there are vietnamese girls ... and then one day we prepare the vietnamese dish and they prepare the african one so that they learn it would be such a nice thing if we could get to that point.*

Other ways to get to know each other's different customs and traditions are clothing ("vestiti") and dancing ("ballo") and also with these activities, the women's ICL communities showed marked sensitivity and ability to take initiative.

******0026 *FG_fg2 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_F**

*but last year every sister brought **a traditional dress from their culture** and learned to dance and each brought a dress from their country and i very much appreciated this new initiative that we proposed also for other **celebrations**.*

The male communities, the seminarians, pay more attention to activities related to "creative self-expression" and team sports ("football" and "basketball") or community occasions such as free time and "holidays".

******0037 *FG_fg2 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_M**

*there are some **proposals** and so on mah i think that are positive things which usually encourages **personal creativity** and to see the community as a place where everyone can freely express their own creativity.*

******0028 *FG_fg2 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_M**

***football and basketball** during_which the five groups play one against the other_what i said before about the **friday's bible sharing sessions** within the groups_then in the summer there is always a **holiday** for those who want to go cycling.*

As mentioned at the beginning, praying is another crucial aspect around which interculturality develops. Prayer, meditation and adoration are privileged moments encouraging people to share their different cultural habits.

******0026 *FG_fg2 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_F**

*mother made a **proposal** to think of a way_for example **in the evening over dinner** the group in charge of the gives **a short presentation about their congregation** their reality in their country so they can show us how our congregations live.*

******0038 *FG_fg2 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_MF**

*every person had the freedom to **pray** their own way with their own **prayer** this is not a proposal but something we created_this freedom to show a little of our culture and **our praying style**.*

It is evident that the topic of interculturality is present at different levels in all the communities, but more attention is given to it by the ICL communities compared to academic contexts.

For FG2 we also applied the Reinert classification technique, which allowed us to identify the so called lexical worlds of the analysed text. The following table shows some of the validation measures used:

| | |
|--|--|
| # of texts: 22 | # of text segments: 3,613 |
| # of forms: 8,029 | # of occurrences: 129,301 |
| # of lemmas: 4,960 | # of active forms: 4,456 |
| # of additional forms: 438 | # of active forms with a frequency >= 3: 1,732 |
| The mean number of modules per segment: 35.7 | # of classes: 3 |
| 3,553 segments classified out of 3,613 (98.34%) | |

The above table shows that the percentage of segments classified is 98.34%: a result sufficiently above the threshold value of 70/75%.

The groups identified are 3, as shown in the dendrogram below; the most characteristic segments are evenly distributed between the first two classes; there is a minority class connected to a very specific topic (Graph. 16).

Graph. 16 – Classification dendrogram of the three topics drawn from the FG corpus with the identification words for each cluster – val.% classified segments in each cluster



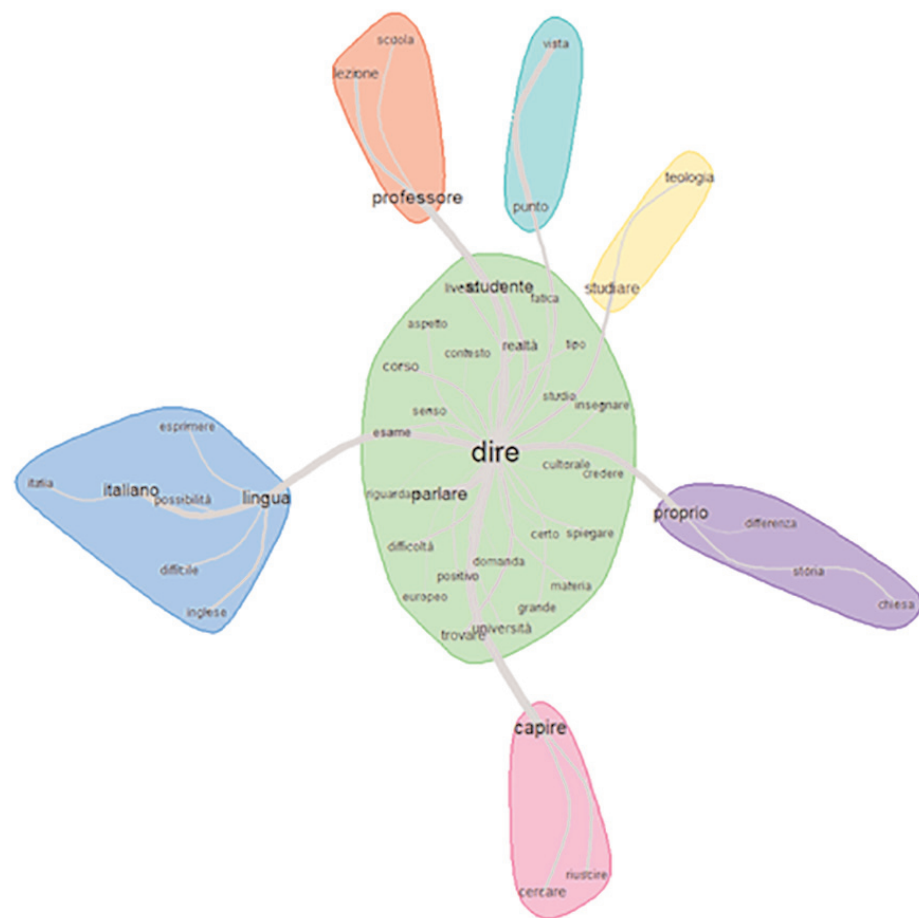
2.4.1 First cluster for FG2: Interculturality in academic life

This first cluster is a summary of the experience of multiculturalism in academic contexts from lecturers and students' point of view. Students' experience of multiculturalism presents some limits from the point of view of language, difficulties in following

“courses” in “Italian” and “English” and interact with other students from other countries. It appears that multiculturality, both if referring to the diverse provenance of students or “professors”, is reflected in the “teaching methodologies” and the way “exams” are run (written or oral).

From the teachers’ point of view, multiculturality (“in ambito accademico”: in the academic environment) urges a reflection on the following: how to organise teaching (“insegnamento”); the teaching “method” to adopt for more effective acquisition of the key “contents” for each discipline; the textbooks (“libri_di_testo”) to adopt, especially for subjects such as “theology”, “philosophy”, “history of the church”, where it is necessary to broaden the western horizons and perspective towards other cultures, because differences connected to cultural provenance are more marked.

Graph. 17 – Graph on the o-occurrences of graphic forms in cluster 1 – Semantic regions

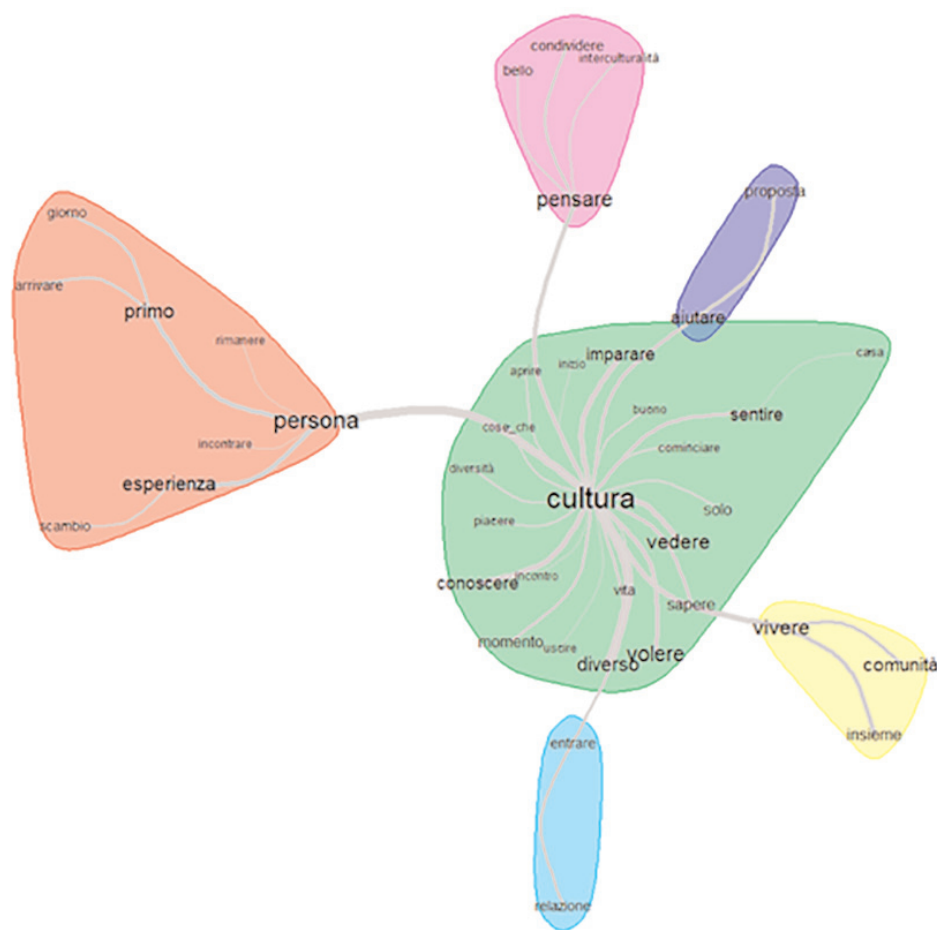


The interpretation of the cluster, together with the graph on the specificities seem to suggest that interculturality is confined to being a challenge and despite constant requests for more efforts on the part of the lecturers, they do not define interculturality as one of their responsibilities. As for the students’ experience, interculturality in the teachers’ curriculum is considered a stimulus to get to know more about other cultures through intellectual endeavour and by meeting and discussing with peers.

2.4.2 Second cluster for FG2: Interculturality for the ICL communities

This second cluster effectively synthesises the experience of interculturality in the ICL communities, and, in part, similar aspects are also present in the dialogues of students belonging to religious communities.

Graph. 18 – Graphs on the co-occurrences of graphic forms in cluster 2 – Semantic regions



At the centre of this topologic representation of this cluster there is the word “culture” (*cultura*), though the most significant graphic forms are in order of frequency: person (*persona*), to live (*vivere*), community (*comunità*), to (get to) know (*conoscere*) and rapport (*relazione*).

From an in-depth study of clusters, it becomes evident that interculturality is not merely a gathering of culturally different people in the same place, but it implies that they grow a connection (*entrare in relazione*) with one another, they get to know each other (*conoscere*), that they experience what it means to really meet someone else and to want to live (*vivere*) together and share (*condivisione*) places, spaces and ideas.

It is no coincidence that lexical regions in this cluster are full of verbal forms, confirming the dynamic dimension people associate with interculturality compared to that of multiculturalism, as already highlighted in previous chapters. Interculturality seems to have **3 dimensions: reflective**, with words like thinking (*pensare*), feeling (*sentire*) and seeing (*vedere*); **dialogical**, with meeting (*incontrare*), exchanging (*scambiare*), getting to know (*conoscere*), and helping (*aiutare*); **proactive-willful**, with verbs like want (*volere*) and learn (*imparare*).

A particular commitment is required in the adoption of an intercultural approach; participants have stressed the fact that it would be more feasible and sustainable to implement this approach in small communities rather than very large ones. This is an aspect which will be discussed more in depth in the FG3 clusters.

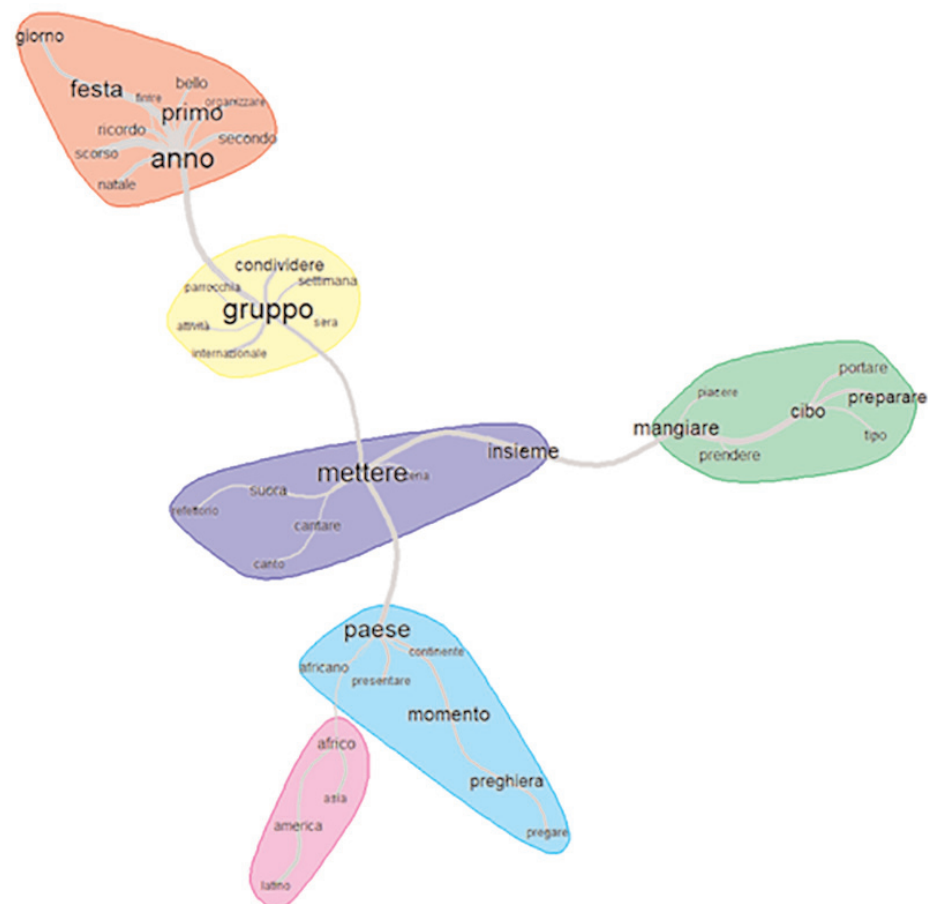
2.4.3 Third cluster for FG2: activities and initiatives proposed and implemented to foster interculturality

This cluster is about the time of the day, places and ways in which intercultural initiatives and proposals become a reality. The words describing when these activities take place are “*sera*” (evening), “*pasto*” (meal) (“*mangiare*”: to eat), “*Natale*” (Christmas day), “*festa*” (festive days/parties) and the moments of prayer. As for words indicating places, they are “*il refettorio*” (the refectory) and “*comunità*” (community). Initiatives that revolve around prayer (*preghiera*), in fact, are the occasions during which each person can talk about the country where they come from; the welcome parties (*feste*) are the events organised to welcome students or members of the ICL communities when they arrive, so as to help them socialise.

Social occasions are, in fact, crucial in the process of meeting and getting to know others, as they create situations where people can share their traditional dishes, show their traditional singing and dancing, use their traditional clothes and through all of these, they deepen mutual understanding and knowledge of each other’s cultural background.

An aspect not yet discussed, as it does not feature in the study of specificities and it is not represented in the co-occurrences graph but only within the cluster, is the aspect of salutations (*il saluto*), the greeting gesture (*salutare*), which is considered particularly relevant in the first meeting phase.

Graph. 19 – Graph of co-occurrences of graphic forms for cluster 3 – Semantic regions

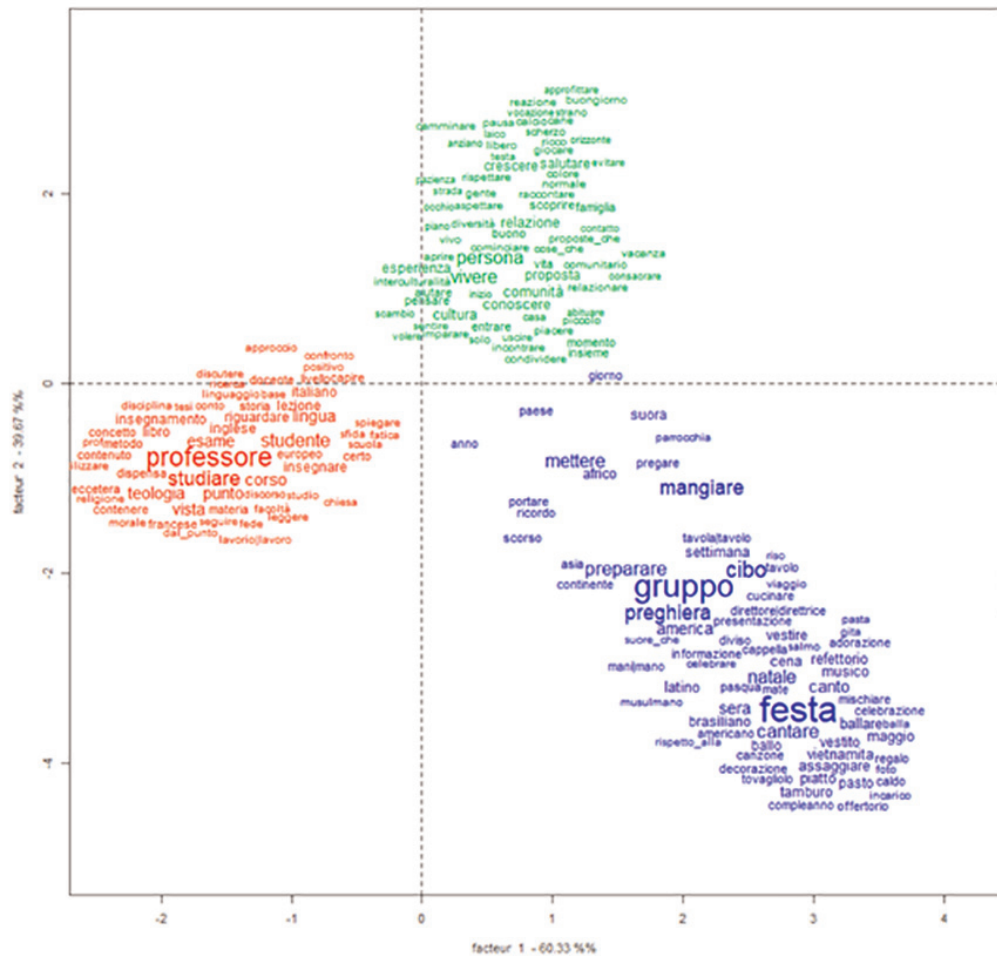


Graph. 19 clearly shows the abovementioned lexical regions, highlighting the activities which can encourage meeting other people and intercultural exchange.

2.4.4 Overview

The graph below illustrates three clusters on the factorial plan. The three half fractions are clearly identifiable; on one side, there are intercultural experiences in ICL communities and at university; on the other, all the initiatives, implemented or still underway, which aim is to foster meetings and communication among people of different cultures.

Graph. 20 – Factorial plan projection of the word clouds for the 3 clusters



2.5 Specificity and semantic classification for FG3

The following are the guiding questions used to facilitate discussions. In this case, the questions were only for students and members of the ICL communities.

Questions to students and members of the ICL communities:

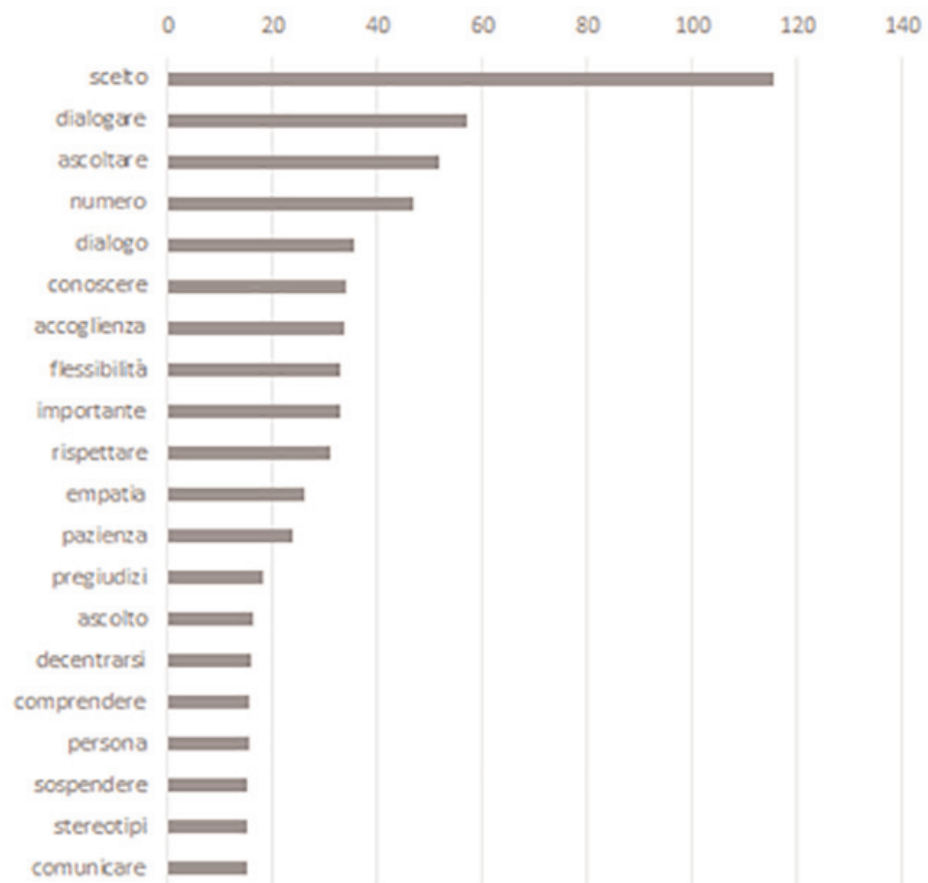
- Q1.** What are the **problems** (or challenges) in a **multicultural education community**? Write concisely on a post-it about a problem you face, referring to the training context in which you live.
- Q2.** Starting from the **problems you brought up** and your experience in a multicultural education environment, what are, in your opinion, the **skills** required today to behave most efficiently and appropriately when dealing with people with a different language and culture from yours? Students are asked to use the worksheet provided to describe 3 aspects they consider particularly useful.

As in the previous groups, also in this case, the first graphic forms appearing in the analysis of the sub-corpus are the key words in the questions. In this specific case, the words are “chosen” (*scelto*) and “number” (*numero*), as participants were asked to choose three aspects out of a list of 45 different skills deemed useful in a multicultural education context (Graph. 21). The word “*scelto*” indicated the student’s selection (*alla fine ho scelto – in the end I chose; ho scelto il termine – I chose the word; ho scelto per primo-I have chosen the first, etc.*); while the word “*numero*” refers to the number associated to a skill in the list (*numero 2, numero 4, numero 7, etc.*)

The other specific graphic forms indicated the most recurrent skills in the *sub-corpus* of all the FG3. The most recurrent words were “the ability to engage in dialogue” (*la capacità di dialogare*), followed by “ability to listen” (*capacità di ascolto*) to another person, “knowledge of your own culture” (*conoscenza della propria cultura*) and of the other people’s different historical, political and religious contexts” (*dei diversi contesti storici, politici e religiosi*), “hospitality” (*accoglienza*), flexibility (*flessibilità*) and respecting people (*rispetto degli altri*). Other useful skills in this context were empathy (*empatia*), patience (*pazienza*), the ability to reduce stereotypes and prejudices” (*ridurre stereotipi e pregiudizi*), to decentre oneself (*decentrarsi*) looking beyond ethnocentric visions, to understand meanings (*comprendere i significati*) and the point of view of another person (*il punto di vista dell’altro*), to suspend judgment (*sospendere il giudizio*) to establish an effective and appropriate dialogue (*comunicazione appropriata ed efficace*) (Graph. 21).

Some abilities were also highlighted because considered useful in favoring communication and networking among people with a different culture and origin, such as “wisdom” (*saggezza*), resilience (*resilienza*), the ability take care of another person (*prendersi cura dell’altro*), trust (*fiducia*) and respect of diversity (*rispetto della diversità*).

Graph. 21 – List of graphic forms and n-grams for the FG3 sub-corpus



However, in order to better understand the contents of the discussions held during FG, considering the fact that their participants belonged to different categories, it is preferable to comment on the specificities of the FG3 sub-corpus separating students from ICL members. The table below lists the specific graphic forms for each group of participants.

Tab. 8 – FG3 sub-corpus specificities for the “Tipocom” variable: students and members and members of ICL communities

| FG3: students | FG3: members of ICL communities |
|---------------|---------------------------------|
| università | numero |
| professore | comunità |
| anno | aspetto |
| classe | scelto |
| professori | viviamo |
| italiano | vita |
| scuola | fondamentale |
| lezione | formazione |
| difficoltà | vivere |
| lezioni | prendo |
| Africa | paese |
| proprio | comunitaria |
| eccetera | consapevolezza |
| collegio | vivendo |
| saluto | perdere |
| studenti | sfida |
| mamma | giudicare |
| capo | valori |
| studiare | valore |
| anni | conflitto |

In the *sub-corpus* of **students’ FG3** there is a predominant tendency to refer to teachers/lecturers, called “professori”. In most of the fragments, it is clear how the topic of interculturality is addressed at different levels in the different communities, however, communities pay more attention to it if compared to academic environments.

The Reinert classification technique was also used for FG3, in order to identify the underlying lexical worlds in the text. The measures of validation for the classification are as follows:

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| # of texts: 18 | # of text segments: 1,502 |
| # of forms: 4,278 | # of occurrences: 53,228 |
| # of lemmas: 2,695 | # of active forms: 2,263 |
| # of additional forms: 366 | # of active forms with a frequency ≥ 3 : 845 |

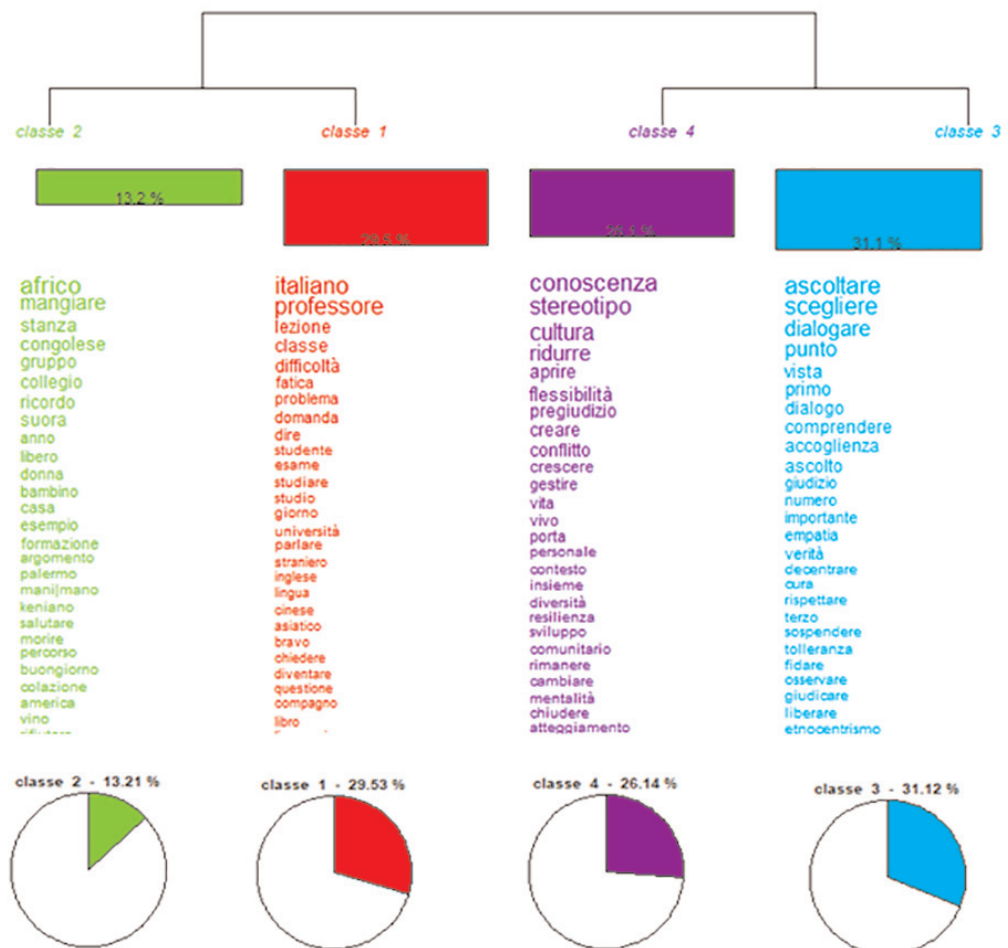
Mean number of modules per segment: 35.4 # of classes: 4
1,385 classified segments out of 1,502 (92.2%)

The table clearly shows that 92.2% of segments were classified: this result is sufficiently over the threshold value of 70/75%.

As the dendrogram below shows, there were 4 groups identified and the most distinctive segments are evenly distributed among three of the four classes. We also added cluster 2 with a minor percentage of fragments connected to daily life in a multicultural community (Graph. 22). In particular, cluster 1 and 2 summarise two different kinds of problems emerging in the multicultural education contexts studied (university and ICL communities). In contrast, cluster 3 and 4 refer to two different groups of competences deemed useful when managing multiculturality.

More specifically, cluster 1 synthesises problems emerging in the academic environment due to the different cultural backgrounds of both teachers and students; cluster 2 refers to problems emerging from living together in ICL communities; cluster 3 refers to the skills which pave the “way” (*la via*) towards interculturality; cluster 4 describes the skills needed for this, the necessary condition to implement an intercultural project.

Graph. 22 – Classification dendrogram for 4 topics extracted from the FG corpus FG with the identifying words for each cluster – val.% classified segments in each cluster



2.5.1 First cluster for FG3: Problems in the academic life due to different cultural backgrounds

This cluster is where some of the most problematic issues are concentrated: the academic context where students and lecturers experience multiculturality on a daily basis. This brings various problems, which also clearly emerged during discussions, despite some language difficulties of the FG’s participants. The problems developed along **two lines**: **rapport between students and lecturers** and **rapport among students**.

As regards the rapport with lecturers, the main difficulty was the language barrier. The use of Italian, appreciated by students as a common form of communication, is a serious impediment to acquisition, studying and to relationships both inside and outside the classroom with their teachers, but also with other students. Some lecturers are aware of this problem and try to tackle it; the result, however, does not always meet expectations. Students perceive their lecturers' efforts in trying to be understood, but this is not usually the norm. Some students even criticise the lecturers' "lack of knowledge" of other cultures. For this reason, some students are more submissive, while others are more critical.

******0059 *FG_fg3 *TipCom_STUD *Sesso_M**

*maybe i see the **professor** too much as an equal while **others are too docile** as if they were **a divine authority** that you cannot touch in my opinion instead they are as playmates ... if i do not participate one may think that it is ok while another **says_ i should keep quiet** because when we are quiet in class and just listen it seems **that in the end the professor is always right**.*

Role management in a multicultural academic context is an important thorny issue because the image of the lecturer and the behaviour students expect from them change according to the students' cultural backgrounds. For this reason, some specific cultural skills and knowledge on managing interculturality should receive more attention from academic institutions during teacher training.

However, in this cluster, a considerable amount of time was spent on problems related to the **rapport among students**. Some of the obstacles which were brought up in discussions were: limited cooperation, disengagement, lack of attention in class, and demands on the student representatives (*rappresentante*) or class representative (*capo classe*). Students with these responsibilities tend to feel overwhelmed by a series of requests beyond their remit, such as: "you must make me photocopies"; "give me your lecture notes", and so on. This way, the role becomes unsustainable.

In addition, there are problems related to the little acceptance of other cultures, the tendency to create small homogeneous groups with similar origin and language and exclude others, and spreading prejudices about all members of a given culture, creating stereotyped and preconceived ideas without foundation. Participants sometimes admitted their "fear of losing one's identity". Encountering and discussing with others can also be experienced with fear, which makes communication and interaction more difficult. Furthermore, the language barrier does not favour communication and dialogue.

2.5.2 Second cluster for FG3: problems connected with living together every day with people of different cultural origins

This second cluster effectively summarises the problems that may arise in ICL's multicultural education communities. The main words in this cluster span from reference to the "African" culture, the different ways of "eating" food and eating habits, the adaptation to climate and temperature, to the different ways of "greeting" and considering "women" and management of diversity in "colleges".

The frequent reference to African culture is due to the countless examples of stereotypes and prejudices faced by participants in this FG with these specific origins. It is not uncommon for them to be asked if there are houses in their country (*ci sono le case*: are there houses?), or if they have clothes and what they are like, or to hear that "all diseases come from Africa and, for this reason, God does not love Africa".

****0064 *FG_fg3 *TipCom_STUD *Sesso_F

all diseases come from africa and that **god does not love africa** because he makes everybody die there in **africa**.

Therefore, the importance of supporting training programs to raise awareness about other cultures is confirmed.

An example is how even “eating” becomes a cultural issue. Some people cannot take alcohol during meals, unlike in Italy, where sipping a glass of wine or beer over a meal is welcome and socially appreciated. Then there are cultures in which eating while standing up at a bar is outrageous, whereas in Italy this is very common; or eating using cutlery without necessarily washing their hands, which is absolutely necessary when food is taken with the hands.

****0053 *FG_fg3 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_M

*in my opinion this is the final stage but he thinks this is the first stage what is important is that we do this thing for example in my culture we cannot eat **without washing our hands** first ... here instead even if someone wants to eat with spoon fork knife and fork here is very common you **cannot even eat with your hands** here boh you come in get a knife get a spoon and eat.*

There is no shortage of fragments in which FG participants explained how they gradually acquired a new habit in Italy, which was completely unthinkable before settling here. The same applies to Italians who experienced living abroad: they learned to distribute meals differently throughout the day, count calories and consume foods according to local customs:

****0055 *FG_fg3 *TipCom_VC *Sesso_M

*but they help you to open up more and to live in that context to give an example when I did my novitiate in zambia I went to a certain village and there people ate **rice and sugar for breakfast** at first I struggled but **then slowly i learned** why they do this, the day is long as people are poor the next meal they eat is at 4 pm and if you don't have such a heavy breakfast practically you'll be hungry all day his is to say that it is important to know why.*

Another important aspect of cultural differences is how people “greet each other”. In Italy, greetings may involve a hug, a kiss or, in some cases, during a meeting, it is not uncommon for people to exchange “pats” on the back, as long as there is intimacy and friendship between them. However, these ways could be considered “disrespectful” in some cultures and are not admissible. For example, what a hug or kiss means in one culture is conveyed in another by shaking hands using two hands. Another example is the expression “good morning, how are you?” which in some cultures is considered bad manners, while in western cultures is used frequently.

There are also cases in which “women” are still victims of prejudices and stereotypes which still consider them subordinated to men.

****0061 *FG_fg3 *TipCom_STUD *Sesso_MF

so let me give a practical example when I arrived here in the first year I had a pretty strong experience when I speak I am used to look into people's eyes an african told me **don't look me in the eye because you are a woman**.

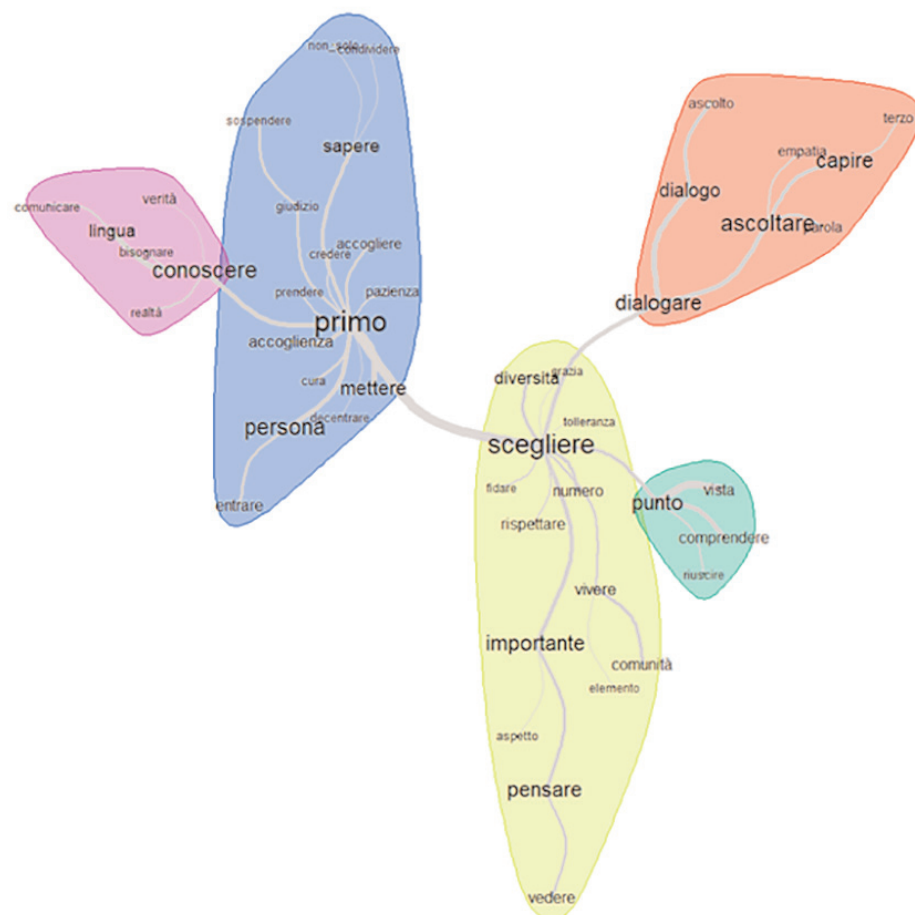
Members of colleges, seminaries and ICL communities try and manage these issues by providing occasions where people can socialise. In some cases, this leads to the creation of “international intercultural groups”, in others, the “groups” are more homogeneous. The idea is to start with what is similar to build a path towards knowledge of and encounter with another person. Some of the initiatives that help build this

path are sessions in which people share spiritual experiences and ways to manage emotions for personal growth. In the latter case, these initiatives start inside culturally homogeneous communities, which open up to debate and understanding of other groups. More specifically, sharing everyday chores and duties helps interculturality: doing things together means learning different ways others do the same thing. It is a way to broaden horizons and knowledge and become more open-minded.

2.5.3 Third cluster of FG3: The way towards interculturality

This cluster is about the main skills deemed useful by FG3 participants to implement an intercultural project. One of the first and most important “choice” (*scelte*) made by participants was that of “trying to understand another person’s point of view”. Another topic is the “ability to change focus” and to show interest in another person. The words that follow are hospitality (*accoglienza*), the suspension of judgement (*sospensione del giudizio*), which are considered useful to establish an empathic (*empatica*) and dialogic relationship (*dialogo, dialogare*). In the list of useful skills, “language” also has a key role, which is coherent with what was discussed in previous paragraphs regarding the issues connected to multicultural contexts.

Graph. 23 – Graph on co-occurrences of the graphic forms of cluster 3 – Semantic regions



A common “language” is, in fact, a communication channel through which people get to know each other.

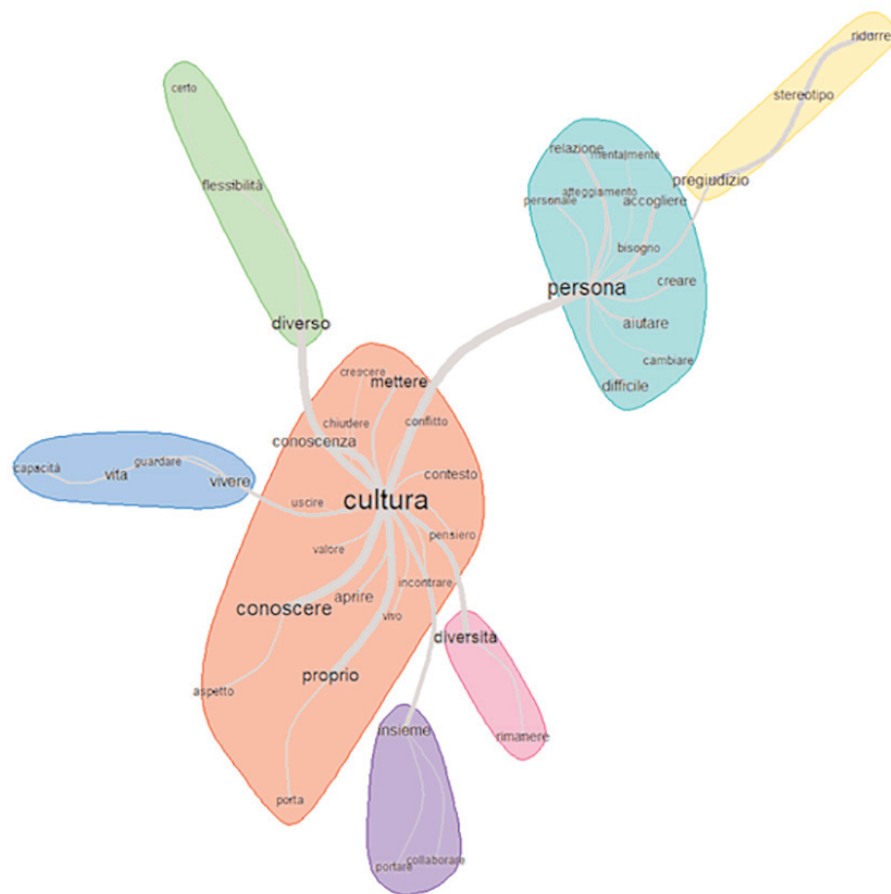
From the contents of this cluster it clearly emerges that FG3 participants are aware of what interculturality is and the skills needed to achieve it. However, the problem of its concrete realisation remains to be solved. From the previously discussed issues,

it seems clear that, despite the efforts made by some academic and non-academic communities, interculturality is not yet regarded as a specific mission to be pursued in both contexts.

2.5.4 Fourth cluster for FG3: The prerequisites for the realisation of interculturality

However, to implement an intercultural project, there must also be some additional skills and conditions. As it can also be seen from the co-occurrence graph, the central concept of this cluster is again the word “culture”. More specifically, the “knowledge” of one’s own culture in order to “open up” to that of another person. “Culture” is associated with the concepts of “diversity” and “flexibility” precisely because meeting the other implies acceptance of the “person” in their “diversity”. However, as already pointed out several times in this report, this is not enough.

Graph. 24 – Graph of co-occurrences of graphic forms for cluster 4 – Semantic regions

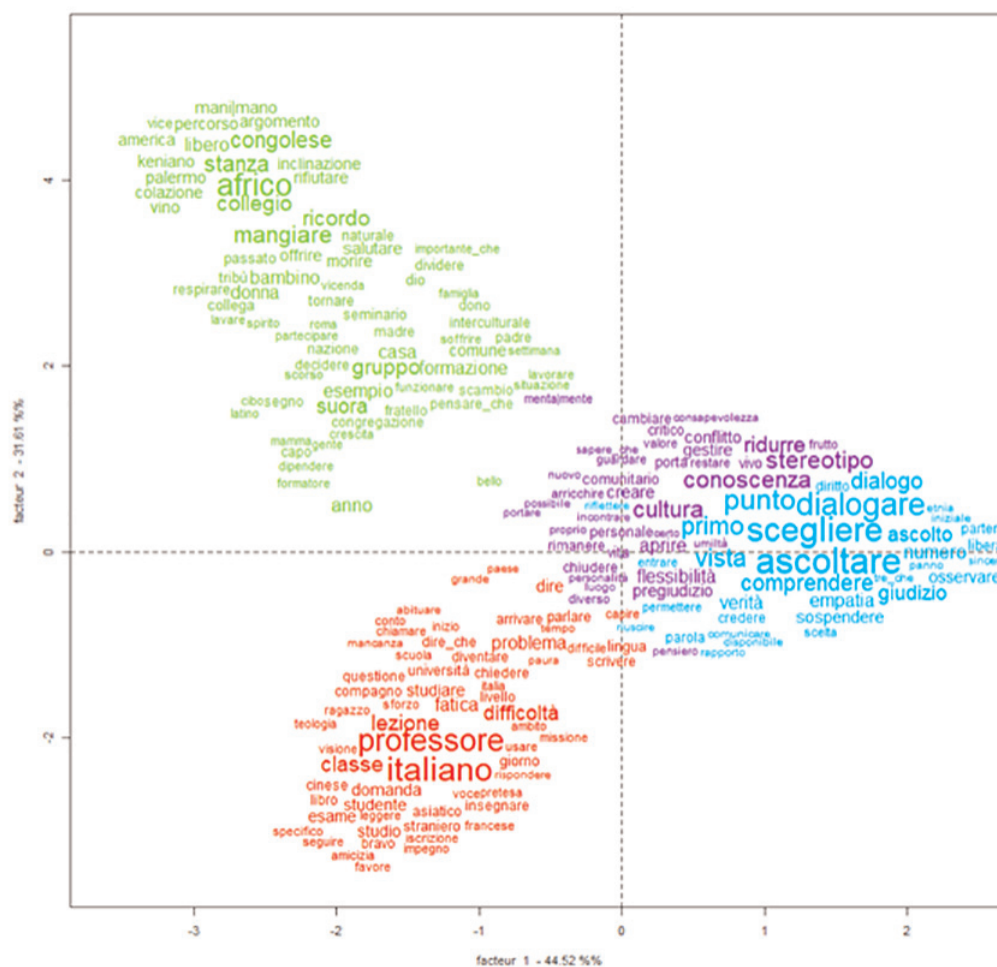


Needless to say, the key for creating a path to achieve interculturality, is to work on oneself and overcome any “stereotyped and prejudicial” ideas about other cultures.

2.5.5 Overview

The graph below shows the four clusters on the factorial plan. Clusters 1 and 2, which refer to the problems of living in a multicultural academic context or ICL community, are clearly different and in opposition. This shows that they are two very different contexts with specific issues. Clusters 3 and 4, on the other hand, describe two different aspects of interculturality and are, in fact, on the same semi-axis, although at different distances.

Graph. 25 – Factorial plan projection of the word clouds for the 4 clusters



3

Conclusions

In conclusion, the study shows that FG participants, from students to teachers, to ICL members, do not have a clear vision of the difference between multiculturalism and interculturalism. Multiculturalism is not managed with an intercultural objective, especially in academic communities where teachers do not perceive this commitment as part of their mission. In the passage from the theoretical enunciation of a definition to the implementation of a plan, numerous obstacles, above all the linguistic one, stand in the way of interculturalism. Consequently, there is a clear need for training in this field.

Of the two contexts observed, academia and religious communities, the ICL training communities appear more committed to interculturalism. The latter seems to be more oriented toward the realization of an intercultural dimension characterized by processes of personal and institutional interchange and transformation/enrichment through the development of specific skills, such as the ability to understand, listen and empathise with the other and through a shift of one's focus – moving from solely focusing on one's self towards that of another. In the university environment, on the other hand, multiculturalism seems to be managed at a more superficial level, applying a principle of mere tolerance of "diversity" and peaceful coexistence.

Therefore, this confirms the importance of supporting training programs aimed at spreading awareness and more in-depth knowledge of other cultures and greater clarity on how to look at multiculturalism from an intercultural perspective.



Endnotes

1. This activity was carried out at two different stages to allow a focused response and avoid the instinctive response, which is highly likely rushed and superficial. At first, participants were given a table with 48 aspects pertaining to skills, attitudes and values potentially valuable for a multicultural context and were asked to choose those which they felt as most important (about 10) in 5 minutes. Subsequently, after their initial selection of 10, the choices were narrowed down to 3 and ranked in order of importance. In the end, they were asked to explain their choices to the group.
2. Cf. E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI, *Interculturality in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities: An Action-Research-Training Project in Italy*, in ID. (eds.), *Education in Multiculturality, Education to Interculturality in Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy*, Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2023, 33-68.
3. The software *NotePad++* was used for data cleaning and preparation, while *IramuteQ*, which draws on the R. Libraries, was used for automated analysis.
4. Personal names and places are in lower case and preceded by “&”.
5. Acronyms are written without dots, in full and preceded by “&”.
6. *N-grams* are sequences of items with diverse grammatical functions: noun sequences, nouns and prepositions, nouns and adjectives, etc. When a sequence of items acquires meaning as a unit, different from the meaning of each of its parts in isolation, it is called a multiword expression (e.g., employment market; the world of work; over-50; soft skills; etc.).
7. To make *n-grams* recognisable, an underscore “_” was inserted between words.
8. Hapaxes are lexical items occurring only once within a text. Normally their frequency should account for 50% or less of all the items in the corpus.
9. The index was calculated as the ratio between graphic forms and corpus occurrences, using the formula $V/N \times 100$. This index is sensitive to the corpus proportion; its limitation lies in the fact that as the corpus occurrences increase, its value tends to drop below the 20% threshold because graphic forms tend to be repeated. If its value is lower than 20%, the *corpus* is considered adequate for a lexicometry test. The version based on lemmas is also used ($L-TTR = Lemmas/N$).
10. In 1935, the linguist G. K. Zipf discovered a crucial relation between words ranking and frequency using the formula $F \times R = c$ (F = occurrences; r = ranking). Frequency is, in fact, inversely proportional to ranking according to a constant growth coefficient. This law is expressed by the equation $f \times r = c$. A valid coefficient approximation is obtained using the formula $\log N / \log V$. Values below or over 1.3 indicate the texts' lexical richness.
11. This index, which measures the lexical richness of a corpus, is less affected by the corpus proportion compared to TTR, because it uses the square root of the number of occurrences as a denominator. The threshold value is 22; if figures exceed this value, they are lexically richer (cf. L. GIULIANO, *L'analisi automatica dei dati testuali. Software e istruzioni per l'uso*, LED – Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economia Diritto, Roma 2004). To be noted that shorter texts tend to score higher and therefore be lexically richer.
12. The lemmatisation process changes an inflected word form to its canonical form, i.e., lemma. A lemma is a primary lexical unit (term). Lemmata have a canonical form (i.e., dictionary entry). This means that Italian dictionary entries need to be singular and masculine (e.g.: *il* instead of *la*; *del* instead of *dei*; *grande* instead of *grandi*, etc.) and only one inflected version of the canonical form, e.g. *parlare* (to speak) instead of its declinations *parli/parlo/parleranno*. Italian is a highly inflected language: verbs have up to 45-50 inflections *parlare/ando/avo/avi/ai/ate*; nouns and adjectives have up to 4 inflections, e.g., *buono/al/le*; adverbs have 1 invariable inflexion, e.g. *non, dietro, sicuramente*; pronouns have from 1 to 4 inflections, e.g. *ogni, loro, suo/a/e/suoi*; prepositions have 6 inflections, e.g. *di/del/della/delle/degli/dei*.

13. Collection of co-texts of a pivot word in the corpus. The co-texts appear around (left and right side) a pivot word. Cf. S. BOLASCO, *Introduction to the Automatic Analysis of Textual Data Via a Case Study*, "Statistica Applicata – Italian Journal of Applied Statistics" 22 (2012) 1, 5-19.
14. The analysis of specificities permits to establish of the under- and overuse of a specific word in a piece of text compared to the expected value. The expected value is the result of the average use of the word in every partition of the corpus. The difference between the real values and the expected one is calculated in terms of probability, using a hypergeometric model, providing an asymptotic approximation to a Gaussian distribution, provided the corpus size and word frequency is sufficiently large (cf. S. BOLASCO, *L'analisi automatica dei testi. Fare ricerca con il text mining*, Carocci, Roma 2013). For the calculation of specificities on this corpus partitions, threshold parameters were at 5% for items with a frequency >10 in the corpus. The absolute value of specificities does not possess lower or higher limits. In general, we graphically represent only words with statistically high specificities.
15. This classification can be applied in three different ways: a) simple classification on texts. This classification groups together the most similar texts; b) simple classification of segments in the text; the text is divided into segments, which are then grouped according to their similarity; c) double classification of groups of text segments. For a classification to be accepted, the percentage of text segments classified must be over 70-75% of the total.
16. It is worth noticing that, generally, the Italian word "proposta" in the singular form is used by the speaker to express their own idea and make their own proposal, whereas the word "proposte" in the plural form, is used to express their own opinion on other's proposals.



Multiculturality and Interculturality

A Qualitative Analysis of the Perspective of Focus Group Participants

❖ Nina Deliu



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Abstract

This work examines the textual content of the focus group interviews conducted as part of the project “*Multiculturality and education in Pontifical universities and formation communities of consecrated life*”. More specifically, it focuses on the first focus group, with an in-depth analysis of the question “*In your opinion, what is the difference between multiculturalism and interculturality?*”. The aim is to investigate, by means of qualitative content analysis methods, participants’ understanding and perspective of the two key concepts of this project, which are often misinterpreted or interchangeably misused. Results will show that participants have a well-clear idea of the concept of *multiculturalism*, seen as a *matter of fact* of cultural *plurality* and *diversity*, and characterized by a *definite and static* nature. They also recognize that a multicultural plurality provides an opportunity for individual growth, but it must be regulated, especially at a communicative level, to allow for a mutually tolerant and respectful coexistence, without necessarily interfering with other cultures. On the contrary, in an *intercultural* context, it emerges the key role of *union and mutual sharing*, with a strong emphasis on *individuals’ cultural transformation*. In this regard, this contribution will bring light to a heterogeneous and often conflicting perspective about the intensity of such transformation. More specifically, to what extent individuals should preserve or lose their own cultural identities, as a result of the intercultural transformation process?

Keywords

Interculturality – Multiculturalism – Cultural transformation – Focus group – Qualitative analysis

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A multicultural community, characterized by the presence of a more or less heterogeneous and diverse cultural pluralism, can give rise to a number of new *opportunities* for our society. However, its complex nature also leads to several *problems* and *challenges* which are well recognized. In fact, in order to allow a full recognition, exploitation, and exploration of new opportunities, individuals belonging to a multicultural community must be trained and educated to develop intercultural competences that could promote mutual sharing, in addition to tolerance and mutual respect. This requirement acquires a vital role in strongly multicultural contexts such as education communities, in which diversity offers a ground for concrete and constant cultural exchange; specifically, we refer to formation communities of consecrated life and ecclesiastical academic communities.

This is the specific context in which this *Action-Research-Training* project, entitled “*Multiculturality and intercultural competences in ecclesiastical institution of higher education and in formation communities of consecrated life*”, is carried out. The starting point is represented by an in-depth survey aiming to evaluate the understanding and perspectives that individuals belonging to such realities have on the two connected but different concepts of multiculturalism and interculturality.

1.1 Brief outline of the research framework

Research objective The specific research question we aim to cover in this work is related to the analysis of the two concepts of multiculturalism and interculturality and their subjective perception, and belongs to the extended focus group survey “*Multiculturality and intercultural competences in ecclesiastical institution of higher education and in formation communities of consecrated life*”. The entire survey is articulated in three thematic focus groups (corresponding to three different scheduled interviews), each of which focuses on the following research question, respectively:

1. *Multiculturality and interculturality*: the aim is to collect and assess participants’ understanding, opinion, and perspective about the two key concepts of the research and their relationship;
2. *Multiculturality and education*: the aim is to collect and assess participants’ understanding, opinion, and perspectives about the role multiculturalism has and should have in their education path, both at the individual level and at the institutional level with their educational offer;
3. *Intercultural competences in multicultural education communities*: the aim is to collect and assess participants’ opinions and perspectives on the skills and competences they believe are useful in strongly multicultural contexts.

Among the different objectives, discussed more in detail by Luca Pandolfi and Enrica Ottone in Part I of this Volume¹, we are interested in providing a comprehensive evaluation to understand: i) the extent to which the value offered by a multicultural community is recognized; ii) the extent to which the opportunities offered by a multicultural community are leveraged into the process of mutual exchange of cultural norms that brings to interculturality; iii) which are the limits and problems that may affect a multicultural community; and iv) how, or by means of which competences, the process towards interculturality is, or can be, achieved.

Preliminary hypotheses The fundamental hypotheses guiding the development of this work are illustrated as follows:

- a. *Members of multicultural communities* (academic institutions or formation communities of consecrated life) recognize the positive value of multiculturalism given by the coexistence of a cultural plurality and diversity. Furthermore, they are will-

ing to activate processes of mutual exchange and personal transformation in view of an increasing enrichment, with the aim of promoting interculturality;

- b. *Institutions* (academic or formation communities of consecrated life) recognize the value of cultural diversity as a source of enhanced “formative”² and educational opportunity for its members, who may increase their potential of developing adequate intercultural competences. However, in relation to how the underlying multiculturalism is handled or addressed, three different scenarios are hypothesized:
 - i. That multiculturalism is not handled at all, either because there is no actual necessity or because institutions are unable to address its implications;
 - ii. That multiculturalism is handled on the surface only, on the basis of a mere tolerance principle: tolerating the “diversity” for guaranteeing a peaceful coexistence;
 - iii. That multiculturalism is managed with an intercultural perspective, activating processes of mutual exchange and sharing, as well as individual and joint transformation, and involving the development of specific competences.

Further details on the research hypotheses are provided in the contribution of Pandolfi and Ottone³. In this *Report*, we will primarily focus on the first hypothesis, analyzing the opinions and perspectives of *individual members* of a multicultural community, rather than institutions.

Research study design The design of the research study as a whole is based on both qualitative (focus group and in-depth interviews) and quantitative data collection approaches. The latter consists of a structured questionnaire-based survey, in addition to a monitoring survey and two assessment surveys, one at an intermediate stage and one at the end of the study. While an in-depth answer to the broader questions of interest is only possible through a complete joint analysis, accounting for the different research phases and approaches (qualitative and quantitative)⁴, here we will only target a specific research question outlined more in detail in Section 1.2. This is primarily related to a qualitative survey conducted through focus group interviews⁵.

1.2 Specific research question

In this work, we will focus on presenting the results of the *qualitative content analysis* of the focus group interviews. More specifically, we will uniquely analyze the *first question* of the *first thematic* focus group, centered on the two concepts of multiculturalism and interculturality, i.e., “*In your opinion, what is the difference between multiculturalism and interculturality?*”.

The complete list of focus group themes and questions is reported in Appendix *The Three Focus Groups*⁶, Part V of this Volume, and it is often discussed by Fiorenza Deriu⁷. Based on the same focus group survey, but accounting for all the thematic areas and questions, in Deriu⁸, a discursive textual analysis of the content is carried out. Instead of such a “quantitative” analysis approach, this contribution will adopt a fully qualitative analysis strategy, which involves, first, reading and codifying the textual corpus, and, subsequently, analyzing the identified coding structure. The process will be documented later in Section 2.

Such analysis will allow us to study and answer the specific research question of interest with a higher degree of details, enabling the researcher to directly capture the nuances and subtleties of a discourse.

The main attention will be placed on participants’ understanding and perspective of the two key concepts of this project, i.e., multiculturalism and interculturality, which are often used interchangeably, also due to their semantic correlation. Further analysis will be conducted to understand whether there exist any differences between gen-

ders (more specifically, between focus groups with only males, only females, or mixed genders) or type of communities (communities of consecrated life or ecclesiastical academic communities, either students or teachers).

2

Methodology

2.1

The focus group interview

The focus group is a qualitative research method used for acquiring data through a group interview in which participants share their opinions and experiences on a specific topic of interest⁹. This technique, often employed in social research, involves a small number of people who have in common a determined experience. The discussions can be guided or open. To illustrate, the researcher or interviewer can follow a lineup of already prepared questions – as in this specific work – to elicit participants' impressions or feelings about a social phenomenon, potential suggestions, or any skills they have developed following a certain experience. However, even in the case of a pre-specified list of questions, these are not administered in a fixed/static way or individually to *each* of the participants. Instead, questions are directed to the entire group with the aim of exploring their dynamic interaction¹⁰.

The goal of the researcher is to understand participants' perceptions and attitudes – often too complex for being collected with static quantitative instruments such as questionnaires – and assess their reactions and evolutions during a continuous and dynamic interaction with the group. In virtue of such key characteristics, focus group interviews are able to capture the degree of consensus or positivity towards specific topics. Notice that such a degree of consensus cannot be summarized with a synthetic index, but it represents an articulated result, which can be used to better understand, formalize, and help to calibrate a decision-making process inclusive of participants' necessities¹¹.

Analogously to quantitative research surveys, in presence of a representative sample that has the potential to saturate the arguments of interest, the results of such qualitative surveys are expected to reflect a broader view that generalizes to the whole target population under study.

2.2

Target population and survey sample

In line with the research topic, the *target population* of the focus group survey has the characteristic of being strongly multicultural and is represented by:

- A. Ecclesiastical academic communities, with the following two units of analysis:
 - a. University teachers;
 - b. University students (both consecrated and laity men and women);
- B. Formation communities of consecrated life (female and male institutes).
 - The (focus group) *study sample* involves:
 - Thirteen (13) institutions, among which six (6) are ecclesiastical institutions of higher education and seven (7) are formation communities of consecrated life;
 - Twenty-six (26) groups, among which seventeen (17) belong to ecclesiastical institutions of higher education – with an equal balancing between groups of teachers only (n=8) and groups of students only (n=9) – and nine (9) belong to formation communities of consecrated life;
 - A total of 298 participants, with 47% females and 53% males.

Each group participated in a number of meetings or focus groups going from one to three (diversified according to the thematic and specific questions of interest). Overall, 65 focus groups have been conducted. A schematic is reported in Table 1; for further details, we refer to Pandolfi and Ottone¹².

Tab. 1 – Details of the final sample of the focus group survey

| | University teachers | University students | ICL members | Total |
|---------------------------------|---|--|-------------|------------------|
| Focus group participants | 92 | 98 | 108 | 298 |
| Unique interviewed groups | 8 | 9 | 9 | 26 ¹³ |
| Scheduled meetings per group | 2 | 3 | 3 | – |
| Overall meetings (focus groups) | 12/16 <i>(4 groups participated only in one of the two scheduled meetings)</i> | 26/27 <i>(1 group participated only in two of the three scheduled meetings)</i> | 27/27 | 65 |
| Institutions | 6 | | 7 | 13 |

The study sample was then extended to an additional number of groups of consecrated men and women that were reached during conferences or training courses by the principal investigators of this research (Luca Pandolfi and Enrica Ottone), leading to a total number of 429 participants. However, we emphasize that the additional participants were only involved partially in the third thematic focus group, thus, they are not part of the sample analyzed in this specific work, which focuses on the first thematic focus group.

The three thematic groups aim to evaluate the following aspects, respectively:

1. Participants perception of multiculturalism and interculturality;
2. Participants experiences in terms of mutual exchange and interaction, and potential educational proposals for promoting interculturality;
3. Critical educational aspects and specific competences.

Clearly, the research question we aim to cover in this work is related to the first thematic group, which involved overall 24 focus groups. For further details on the other thematic groups, and their related questions, we refer to Fiorenza Deriu¹⁴.

2.3 Data analysis

If on one side analyzing qualitative data arising from focus group interviews offers a substantial opportunity in terms of their interpretation, on the other side, accurate attention needs to be placed to address certain issues arising in such types of surveys.

Differently from other types of qualitative surveys such as individual interviews, here, the researcher has to decide the focus of the analysis: either at the individual level (with reference to each individual participant) or at the group level.

In this work, considering the strong degree of homogeneity of the individuals of each focus group, both in terms of their belonging community, the units of analysis (teacher or student), and in terms of their gender, we proceed with a group-level analysis. Indeed, almost half of the focus groups are characterized by only males or only females participants.

Furthermore, an analysis conducted at a group level determines a higher chance of capturing consensus in terms of shared attitudes and perceptions. Notice, however, that such a consensus could be erroneously inferred by the researcher when not all the participants actively intervene in the discussion.

Differently from quantitative surveys, whose analysis is often mostly based on the statistical software, and has a stronger degree of automation, analysis of focus group data requires greater involvement of the researcher and a direct engagement with the data content.

There exist two approaches for the analysis of such a type of textual or content data: the quantitative and qualitative approaches. In general, their combination and integration can bring rise to details on different aspects of the same interview, contributing to a research of great rigor and quality¹⁵.

To this end, in order to integrate the quantitative approach adopted in Fiorenza Deriu¹⁶, here we propose a completely qualitative analysis, conducted with the MAX-QDA software¹⁷.

2.3.1 Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis (QCA), or analysis of qualitative data, represents one of the most commonly used approach for analyzing data arising from qualitative surveys¹⁸. QCA is considered a reliable, transparent, and highly interpretable method¹⁹.

Independently on the adopted type of QCA or type of qualitative survey, the approach is based on the construction of categories, better known as *codes*, and a system of codes, known as *coding frame* or *codebook*. What Bernard Berelson formulated for the QCA in 1952 can be highly extended to nowadays, with reference to both the qualitative and the quantitative approach:

«Content analysis stands or falls by its categories ... since the categories contain the substance of the investigation, a content analysis can be no better than its system of categories»²⁰.

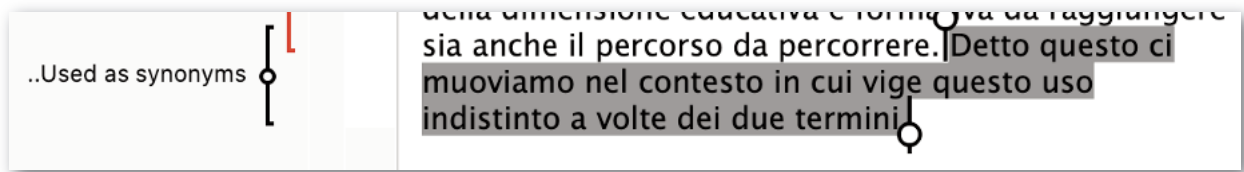
These categories or codes represent the constituting blocks for developing a theory or for inferring a conclusion while carrying out a qualitative analysis. There exist three ways of reasoning for doing so.

- a. The deductive, *top-down* or *concept-driven*, reasoning, according to which categories are *a-priori* defined based on:
 - a. an underlying theory;
 - b. the study of the literature (current state-of-the-art);
 - c. the research question (for example, according to the questions used by the researcher during an interview).
- b. The inductive, *bottom-up* or *data-driven*, reasoning, according to which the developing process of the codes occurs through an open *step-by-step* procedure. The starting point is the data itself; categories are appropriately assigned to the parts of interest, until full saturation. Subsequently, the coding frame undergoes a hierarchical reorganization and/or restructuring.
- c. A hybrid approach, based, first, on deductive reasoning, and then, inductive reasoning to integrate the former.

In this *Report*, a hybrid approach was adopted. After an initial phase in which the research questions, more specifically the questions and the key concepts raised during the interview, are studied, the textual data are codified according to these key elements. No underlying theories are considered at this stage, as they may compromise the textual richness, induce a bias in the results, or limit the *discovery* nature, which represents a great goal in qualitative research.

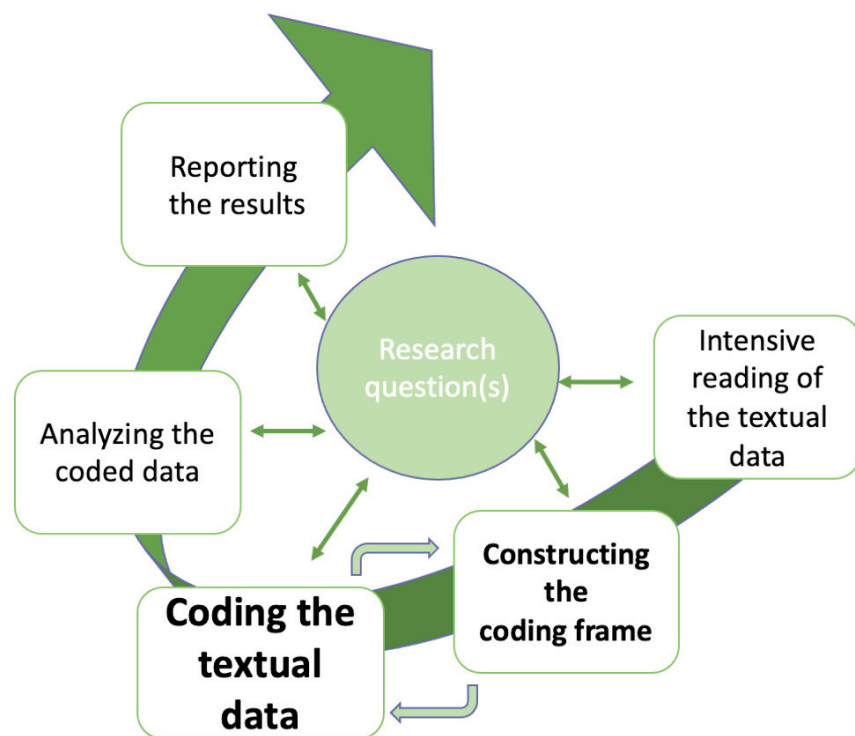
The coding step represents, thus, a decisive phase in QCA methods. More specifically, this process refers to the assignment of categories, or codes, to parts of the text that may have a key role. To illustrate it more concretely, the following figure (Fig. 1), reports a fragment of the analyzed corpus with its respective code.

Fig. 1 – Example of a code created in the QCA method.
The codified corpus alludes to the general misuse of the concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism as two synonyms



The general process of a qualitative type of analysis with the QCA method is illustrated in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2 – General process of the QCA method



It becomes clear that the research question, or questions, play a fundamental role in providing an initial perspective and intuition to the intensive reading step, and subsequently the coding frame construction and the coding steps. Notably, the coding phase is based on the key concepts (and initial research hypotheses) that define the research question²¹.

Often, the working process occurs in a circular way. The coding frame can be revised and re-structured in multiple cycles, typically two²², as done in this work.

Once the coding phase is concluded and validated, the researcher proceeds with the analysis of the codified data. This can be performed according to two directions:

- a. *Category-based* analysis: the focus is on the topics, thus, the codes themselves; they can be analyzed one at a time, or more than one simultaneously;
- b. *Case-based* analysis: the focus is on the participants and their characteristics or specific subgroups, e.g., females.

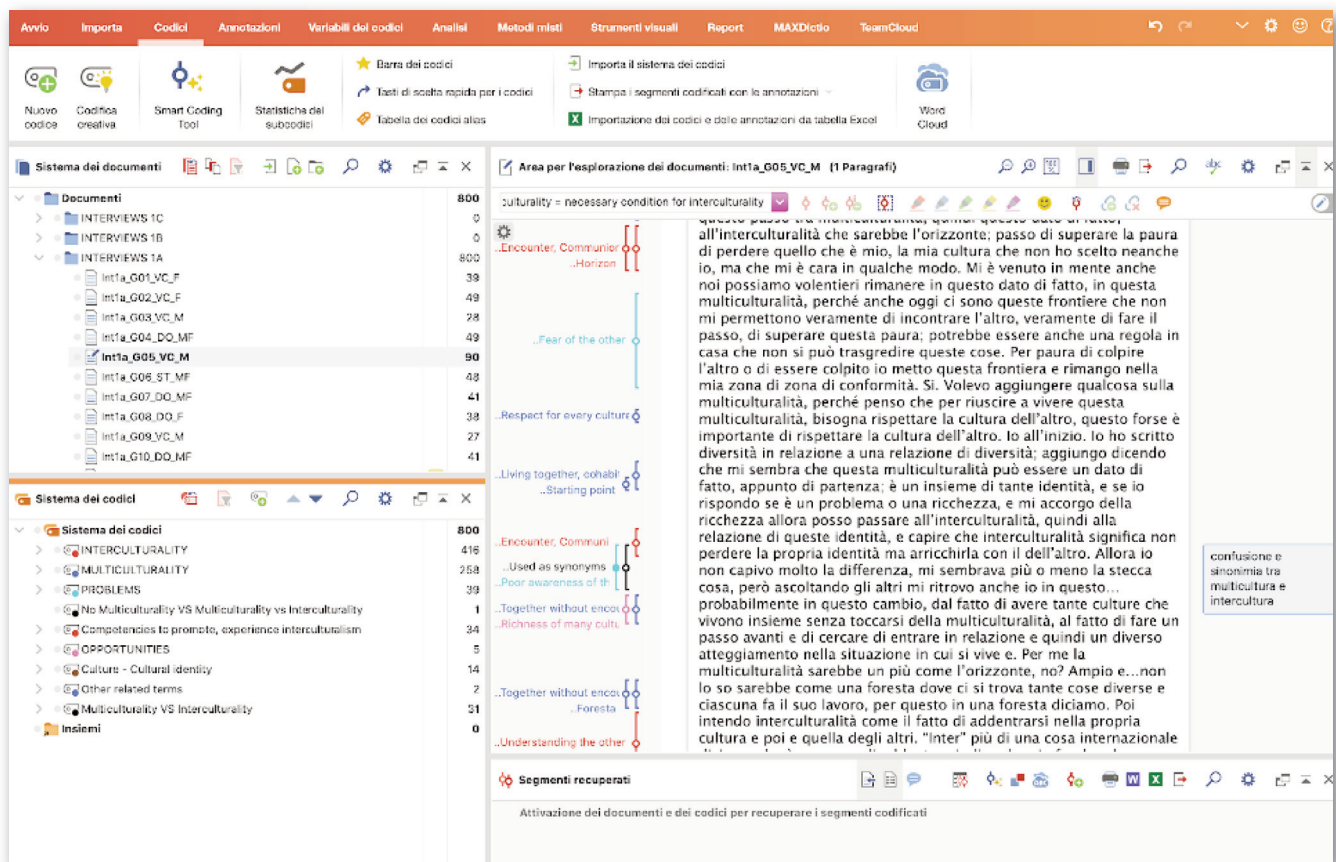
In this work, we will present both types of analyses.

2.3.2 MAXQDA Software

MAXQDA represents one of the most widely used softwares for qualitative data analyses worldwide. It can process different types of documents (e.g., textual data, tables, images, or recordings) and has a friendly and intuitive interface.

As depicted in Fig. 3, which illustrates the main interface of the software during the coding procedure of one of the focus group transcriptions, the presence of multiple windows allows for simultaneously reading the textual data and coding the parts of interest (top right), while keeping track of the different documents (e.g., focus group transcriptions; top left) and the coding frame created so far (bottom left).

Fig. 3 – MAXQDA 2022 interface (in Italian, with codebook in English), during the textual coding process



Further, this software offers different methods of textual data analysis (statistical methods such as frequencies, strictly qualitative methods involving the coding part, or mixed methods). A wide range of tools are also available for the visualization part – as later illustrated in the results section – and the reporting part, which can be automatically made according to the created code frame as well as the textual segments that were coded.

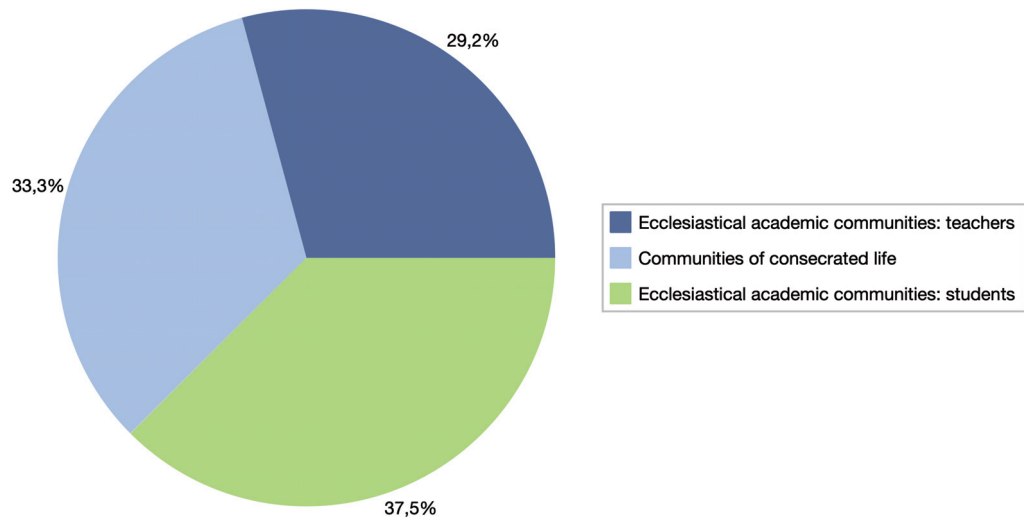
3 Results: participants

As reported in Section 2.2, the specific focus groups we refer to in this work have as target population the two realities of ecclesiastical academic communities and formation communities of consecrated life (female and male individuals).

The overall number of involved focus groups is 24, and our interest is in the first thematic focus group carried out during the first of the two or three scheduled meetings.

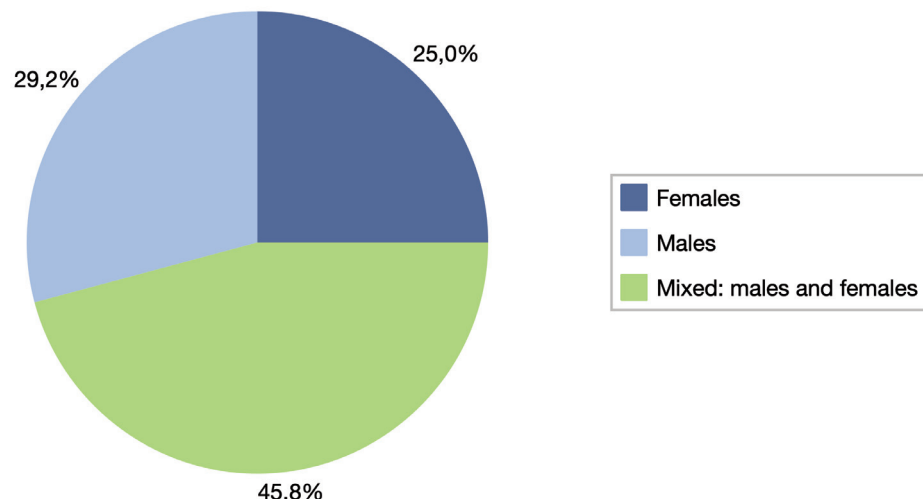
The sample distribution (with data aggregated by focus group) of the variable “Type of Community” is reported in Fig. 4. As shown, 33.3% (n = 8) of focus groups is constituted by participants belonging to formation communities of consecrated life, with the remaining ones 66.7% (n = 16) representing an ecclesiastical academic community. Among the latter, n = 9 are part of the “Teachers” group, while n = 7 refer to the “Students” group. We emphasize that students belong to higher education (university) institutes and can be either consecrated individuals or laity people.

Fig. 4 – Distribution of variable “Type of Community”



The different communities, or the different focus groups, involve either participants of mixed gender (males and females) or represent exclusively male or female participants. The gender distribution is reported in Fig. 5 and shows a certain balance between the two different genders.

Fig. 5 – Distribution of variable “Gender”



These two variables are utilized in the *case-based analysis* to understand differences between these “cases” or participants.

4

4. Results: wordcloud and codebook

4.1

4.1 Wordcloud: tokens frequency

The analyzed textual data is composed of 33,118 words or tokens, 13,110 of which are added to the exclusion list, as they are not considered relevant for the aim of our textual analysis. Examples of the latter include conjunctions (e.g., “and”) or some adverbs (e.g., “while”).

Adopting a conservative approach, based on which only *highly* non-relevant tokens were excluded, in Tab. 2 we report the list of most frequently detected words in our data. The tokens are reported in the original language (Italian), as well as in their English translation. This first approach to reading the results, only surfaces the problem of interest, providing a diversified view on the topic, with a high prevalence of words with a negative connotation such as: i) “not” or “no”, followed by ii) concepts that refer to the own person/figure (“I”, “me”, “my” which may allude to the fact that individuals are trying to express something that is subjective such as the personal opinion or view, and iii) the use of the words “other”/“different” and “this” *versus* “that”, which indicates a perception of someone or something that is different/extraneous within multicultural or intercultural contexts.

Subsequently, we can notice the high prevalence of the words “culture”, “cultures”, “multiculturality”, “interculturality”, which represent an echo of the research topic of interest. Finally, we can capture a more positive trait and attitude in discussing the phenomenon, with the use of tokens such as “us”, “with”, “together”, “also”, and “as” (used for making comparisons and detecting similarities).

Tab. 2 – List of the most frequent tokens

| Order | Word (Italian; original language) | Word (English translation) | Frequency | Frequency % | Documents | Documents % |
|-------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1 | non | not | 536 | 2.72 | 24 | 100.00 |
| 2 | anche | also, as well | 373 | 1.89 | 23 | 95.83 |
| 3 | cultura | culture | 371 | 1.88 | 24 | 100.00 |
| 4 | io | I | 366 | 1.86 | 24 | 100.00 |
| 5 | culture | cultures | 341 | 1.73 | 24 | 100.00 |
| 6 | come | how | 323 | 1.64 | 23 | 95.83 |
| 7 | interculturalità | interculturality | 273 | 1.39 | 23 | 95.83 |
| 8 | multiculturalità | multiculturality | 256 | 1.30 | 23 | 95.83 |
| 9 | questo | this | 246 | 1.25 | 24 | 100.00 |
| 10 | insieme | together | 220 | 1.12 | 24 | 100.00 |
| 11 | con | with | 196 | 0.99 | 21 | 87.50 |
| 12 | ci | us | 195 | 0.99 | 23 | 95.83 |
| 13 | mi | me | 183 | 0.93 | 21 | 87.50 |
| 14 | me | me | 178 | 0.90 | 23 | 95.83 |
| 15 | altro | other | 170 | 0.86 | 22 | 91.67 |
| 16 | questa | this | 168 | 0.85 | 23 | 95.83 |
| 17 | diverse | different | 153 | 0.78 | 23 | 95.83 |
| 18 | quello | that | 123 | 0.62 | 22 | 91.67 |
| 19 | no | no | 118 | 0.60 | 16 | 66.67 |
| 20 | mia | my | 113 | 0.57 | 19 | 79.17 |

Tab. 2 reports also the relative frequencies and the number of documents (or focus groups) containing that token.

Extending now the study of tokens to a deeper layer, where each word occurs an inferior number of times but has a primary importance for the thematic of interest, we report in Fig. 6 the word cloud of the first 50 more prevalent words within focus groups. A highlight is now placed on the keywords that define and characterize the words multiculturalism and interculturalism. These include “identity”, “encounter”, “relationship” and “many”.

It is now interesting to see the presence of verbal forms such as the keyword “living”, referred to a shared living in a given place (notice also the high frequency of “where”), and elements related to communication aspects (“say”), a crucial element for the establishment of a dialogue. While the token “written” is referred to a verb that is similarly related to communication aspects, the reader could notice that this word is often used by participants to express reflections (images and definitions) that were reported by themselves in a written form at the beginning of the interview. In fact, during the first focus group meeting, an initial brainstorming was scheduled, and participants were invited to write down a word related to multiculturalism and another one related to interculturalism.

Fig. 6 – Word cloud of the most frequent words or tokens (in Italian). Please refer to Tab. 2 for their English translation



4.2 Codebook: overview of the codes

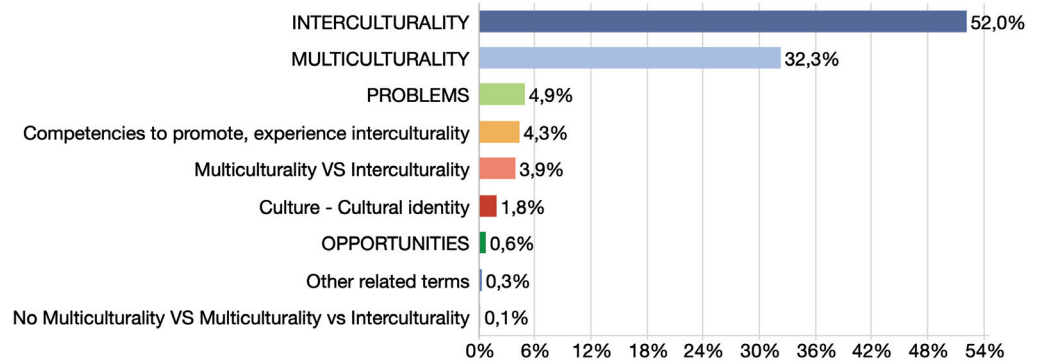
The reading, interpretation, and analysis of the textual data (in relation to the research topic), resulted in the construction of a codebook of 260 categories overall structured in a hierarchical way and a total of 800 coded segments. The full system of codes, with the relative frequency of the correspondent segments, is reported in the Appendix (Tab. A1). Here, we provide a general overview of the macro-categories and the main concepts that emerged from the focus group discussion.

In Fig. 7, we show the macro-categories defining the codebook created for the analysis of focus groups’ transcriptions. As one can notice from their frequency, the two concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism dominate participants’ discussions, with a clear predominance of the second term over the first one (427 versus 272).

The main reason for such a prevalence is related to the greater ease in understanding and explaining the phenomenon of multiculturalism compared to interculturalism, which requires greater efforts to provide the appropriate details and examples to reach the depth of this phenomenon.

During the focus group interviews, the discussion often touches upon the necessary competences for promoting interculturality, the opportunity created by multicultural communities, and their potential problems. These three topics have been coded as well and will be described in more detail in Section 6.

Fig. 7 – Macro-categories (level 1) of the final codebook



An overview of the lower-level categories (micro-categories) is anticipated in Fig. 8. Here, we can notice concepts such as “plurality, diversity, particularity”, and, more interestingly, “encounter, communion, exchange and contamination”, and “entering in dialogue, communication, relation”, which results in strong contrast with “together without meeting or relating”. As we will later illustrate, such a contrast is also induced by the basic opposition between multiculturalism and interculturality that characterizes the question of interest participants are asked to discuss, i.e., “*In your opinion, what is the difference between multiculturalism and interculturality?*”.

Fig. 8 – Overview of the partial codebook (i.e., 50 most frequent codes) based on the focus groups’ transcriptions

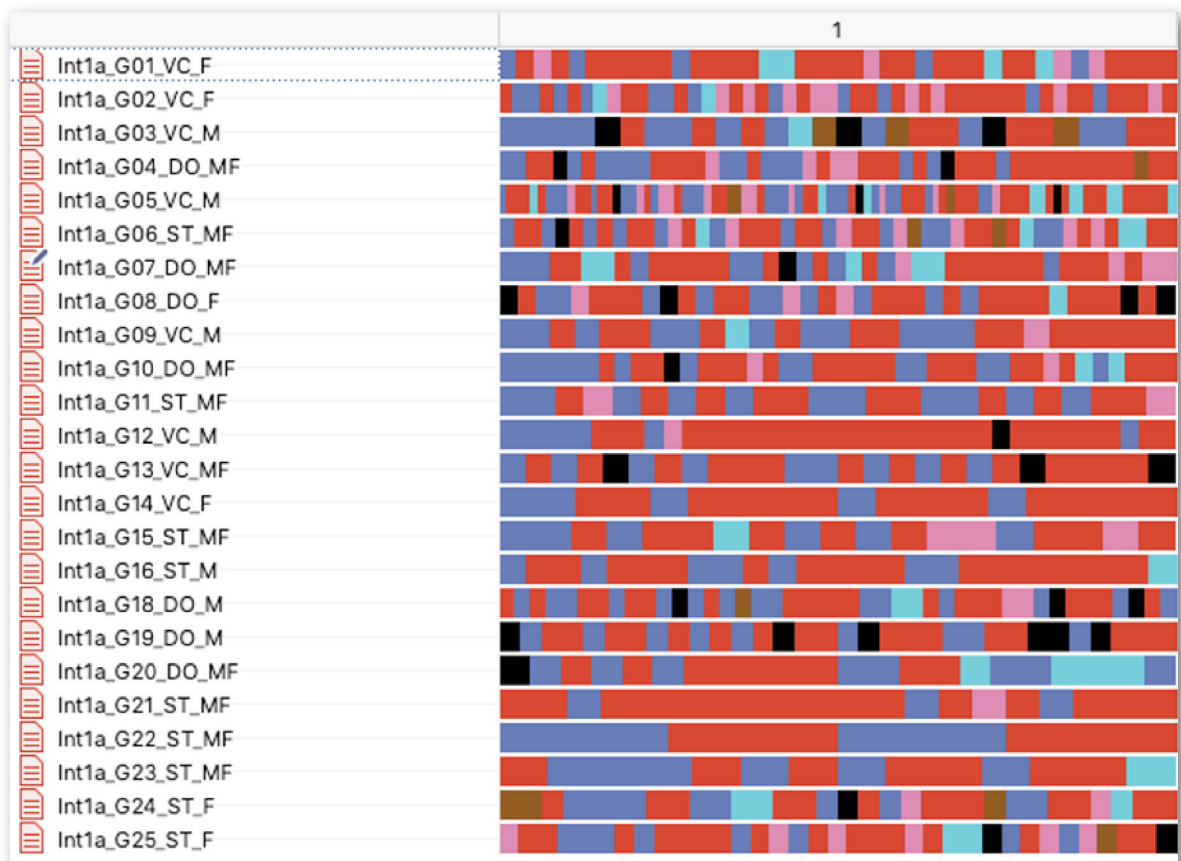


4.3 Comparison between transcription documents of the different focus groups

Fig. 9 provides an overview of the prevalence of the macro-categories reported in Fig. 7 with reference to each individual focus group. It clearly depicts the substantial focus during these interviews on the concept of interculturality (compared to multicultural-ity). Each row of Fig. 9 represents a textual document (i.e., the transcription of the interview) related to each focus group, with the different colors referring to the different macro-categories or macro-themes discussed during the interview. In addition to noticing the great imbalance favoring the phenomenon of interculturality, one could also notice a general pattern in the thematic subsequence. In fact, at the beginning of the interviews, the topic of multicultural-ity is typically covered (Fig. 9; blue color), followed then by discussions on the concept of interculturality (Fig. 9; red color), which is touched on during multiple moments of the interview and lasts until the end.

All focus groups fully cover the two points, i.e., they all focus on the two concepts of multicultural-ity and interculturality, and a great part also deals with the potential opportunities (Fig. 9; pink color) and problems (Fig. 9; green color) arising in multicultural contexts. Finally, the black color refers to the parts of the text where the two central concepts of this survey are jointly discussed and compared.

Fig. 9 – Comparison between focus groups in terms of their correspondent codebook and macrocategories



In Fig. 10 we also report the analytical distances (*block distance*²³) between statistical units (focus groups), with respect to the created codebook. The graph allows us to identify semantical clusters and understand the diversity and/or similarity between the different focus groups. The cluster positioned at the center of the plot, i.e., the central aggregation of points (each representing a focus group) shows a great

similarity between the textual documents, with the exclusion of three focus groups (G05, G07, and G18), in which emerges a major component of novelty and richness in describing the two concepts of multiculturalism and interculturality. This is particularly true for the second term, for which the block distance between the statistical units results to be slightly increased (compare Fig. 11 and Fig. 12).

Fig. 10 – Semantic clusters determined according to the *block distance* between statistical units (focus groups) with respect to the whole system of codes

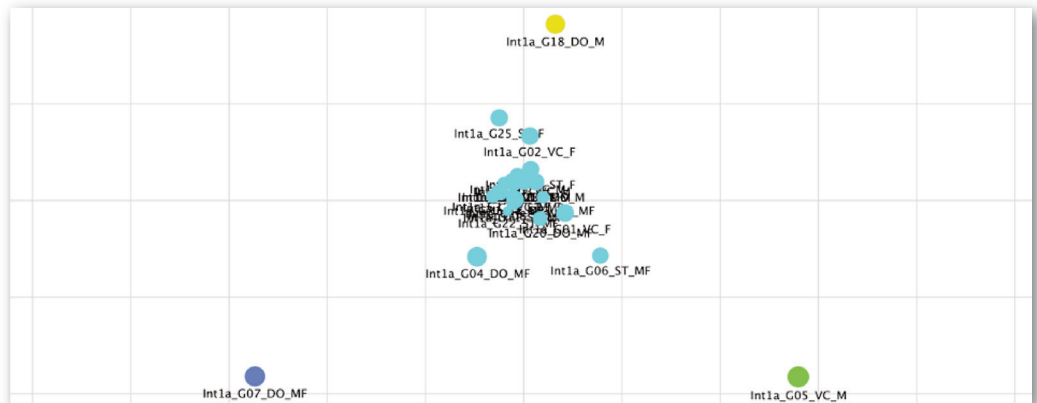


Fig. 11 – Semantic clusters determined according to the *block distance* between statistical units (focus groups) with respect to the codes uniquely related to multiculturalism

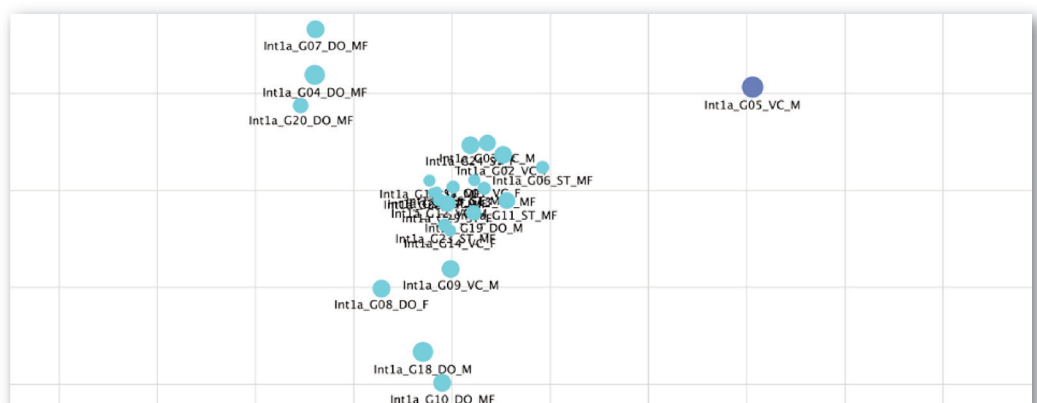
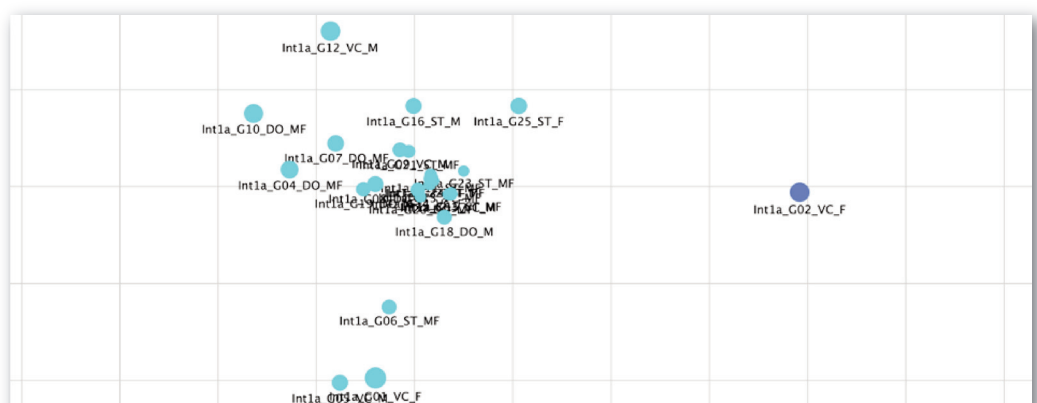


Fig. 12 – Semantic clusters determined according to the *block distance* between statistical units (focus groups) with respect to the codes uniquely related to interculturality



5

Results: multicultural ed interculturality

5.1

General overview

In Fig. 13 and Fig. 14, we provide a general overview of the most relevant codes characterizing the two concepts of multiculturalism and interculturality, respectively. It results immediately clear that the concept of multiculturalism is related first to the recognition of a “diversity” and “plurality” within a “certain space, time, context”. However, such “diversity” and “plurality” is subject to a “lack of encounter or relationship”.

Multiculturalism is seen as a “matter of fact”, of a “definite and static” nature. Furthermore, in a multicultural context the “cultural identity of each one” assumes a relevant role.

The notion of “personal identity” is re-stated again when the concept of interculturality is defined (Fig. 14). However, now a major role is played by “encounter, communion, exchange and contamination”, which is however constrained by the fact that it may occur “without blending, changing or losing the personal identity”.

Participants have it clear that in an intercultural context there’s a greater openness towards both “receiving and welcoming the other” as well as “giving to the other”. This process is however dictated by an a-priori “intentionality”, often characterized by a certain “commitment, effort”, for example, to “finding commonalities, a common purpose”.

Fig. 13 – Cloud of the codes corresponding to the concept of multiculturalism (10 most relevant or prevalent, codes)



Fig. 14 – Cloud of the codes corresponding to the concept of interculturality (10 most relevant or prevalent, codes)

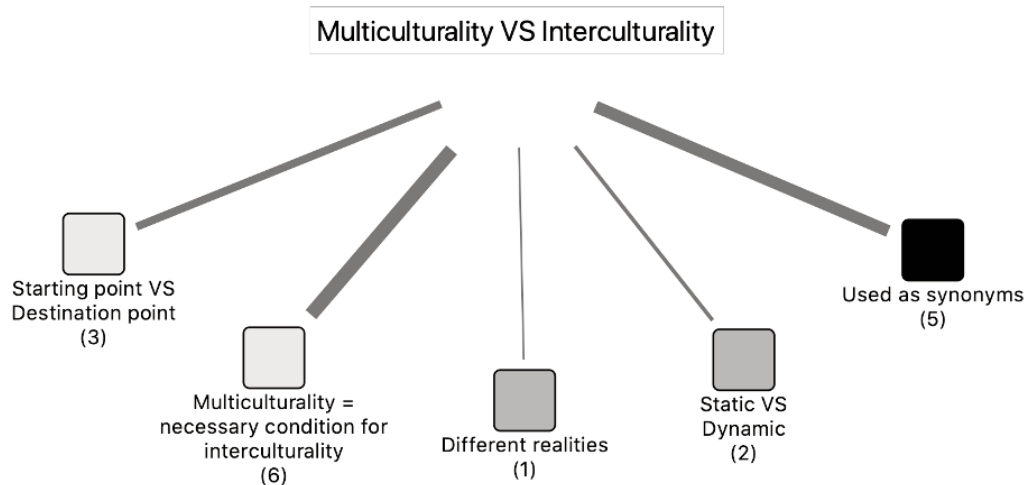


In general, the two concepts seem to be clearly understood; particularly, two highlights are placed on: i) the contrast between a static phenomenon, seen as a “starting point”, and a dynamic one, which culminates in the “destination point”; and ii) multiculturalism as a necessary condition for interculturality.

However, it is also emphasized that the two concepts are often used as synonymous.

In Fig. 15, an image of these contrasts is depicted; the intensity of each line is proportional to the relative frequency of each code.

Fig. 15 – Summary of the main differences between multiculturalism and interculturality. Line width indicates the frequency of each specific subcode: the thicker the line, the higher the frequency



5.2 Multiculturalism

Prior to entering into the merits of the multiculturalism-specific qualitative analysis, we provide its definition below.

«The term **multiculturalism** is used here to refer to that social and cultural phenomenon which is realized when there is a stable, and in some way interactive (with or without tensions) co-presence of people coming from different social and cultural backgrounds. The forms of multiculturalism (and models of multiculturalism), vary according to the possible interaction forecasted, promoted and received: these may go from separatist division, with few and well-defined interactions, to wider forms, marked by tolerance, exchange and life-work experiences in common. However, the horizon for multiculturalism (given that it is tolerant, welcoming and taken on as a project) still remains a form of reciprocal, cordial but essentially **weak exchange** unless there is a meeting between the protagonists involved which leads to major, content transformations (in cultural traditions, habits and customs, ways of thinking and behaving): a possible and diversified experience of cohabitation and cooperation»²⁴.

The key elements for describing a multicultural context are:

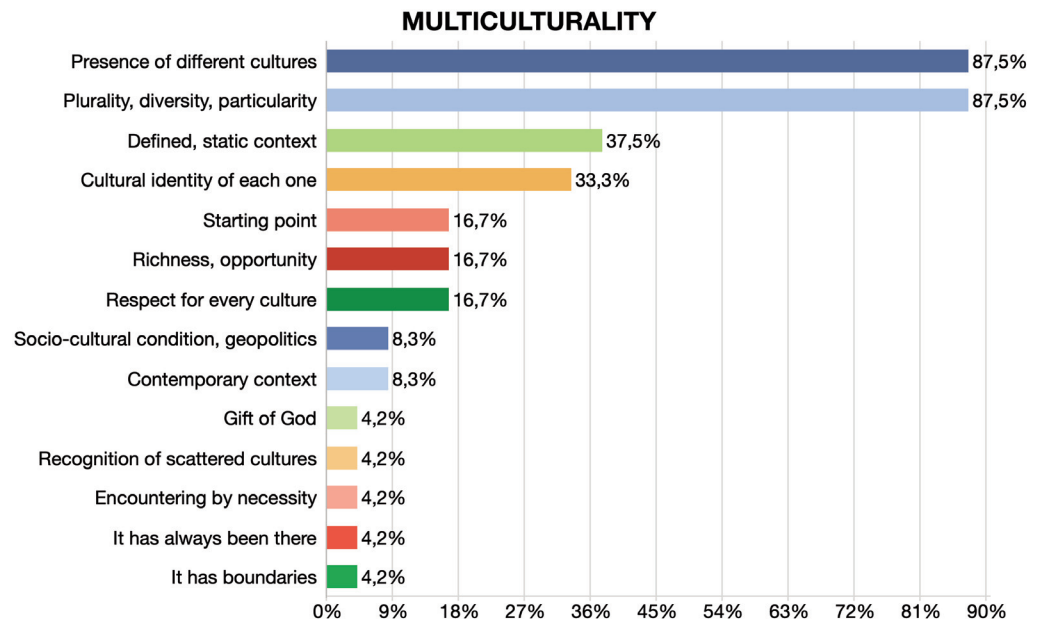
- stable co-presence
- different social and cultural backgrounds
- cordial but essentially weak exchange, and
- lack of substantial changes or transformations.

5.2.1 Key concepts emerged from the focus group survey

In Fig. 16 we provide a statistical summary of the sub-codes of the concept of multiculturalism, as emerged during the focus group interviews. To illustrate, the most frequent code is “presence of different cultures”, which was reported in 87.5% of the focus groups. One should notice that such code incorporates two of the key elements

as reported in the formal definition above (paragraph 5.2), i.e., “presence” or co-presence and “different cultures”. This is then followed by “plurality, diversity, particularity” – a key element as well – with again 87.5% of the focus group documents reporting it.

Fig. 16 – Statistics of focus groups’ sub-codes (level 2) corresponding to the concept of multiculturality



While these two codes have a high relevance within most of the focus groups, the remaining ones only cover from 4.2% to 37.5% of the transcriptions.

It is again uniformly evident how multiculturalism is perceived as a “defined, static” phenomenon, but at the same time, it is widely recognized to be a “starting point” for a process of growth and transformation towards interculturality. Participants also recognize it to be a source of “richness, opportunity”, but not exempt from difficulties or limits (“it has boundaries”).

However, some contrasts of opinions exist with reference to the temporal characterization of the concept: sometimes it is argued that multiculturalism “has always been there” and some other times it is considered to be part of a “contemporary context”.

As reported in the following original (i.e., in the original Italian language) textual segments, along with their extract in English (ENG), participants express that: “multiculturalism is a phenomenon that has always been there”, “it is a characteristic of nowadays societies”, and “it is the context of the contemporary world”.

*“La mia cultura e poi la tua cultura fa la multiculturalità. Quindi esistono. C’è una multiculturalità perché ce ne sono tanti. **La multiculturalità è un fenomeno che c’è sempre stato.** E poi multiculturalità è una cosa che è stata sempre apprezzata perché in quei tempi noi avevamo il nostro re, la nostra politica. In Italia c’erano degli stati di Savona, di quant’altro. Nessuno voleva andare a far parte dell’altro”. (Int1a_G09_VC_M, Pos 1).*

[Reduced extract in ENG: **Multiculturalism is a phenomenon that has always been there.** Furthermore, it has always been appreciated as in previous times we had our king, our political system. In Italy, there were the States of Savona. No one wanted to be part of any other State except their one].

“Io ho scritto L’oggi in Multiculturalità che mi sembra un po’ la **caratteristica delle società di oggi** che sono formate da tante culture messe insieme per tanti motivi diversi”. (Int1a_G11_ST_MF, Pos 1)

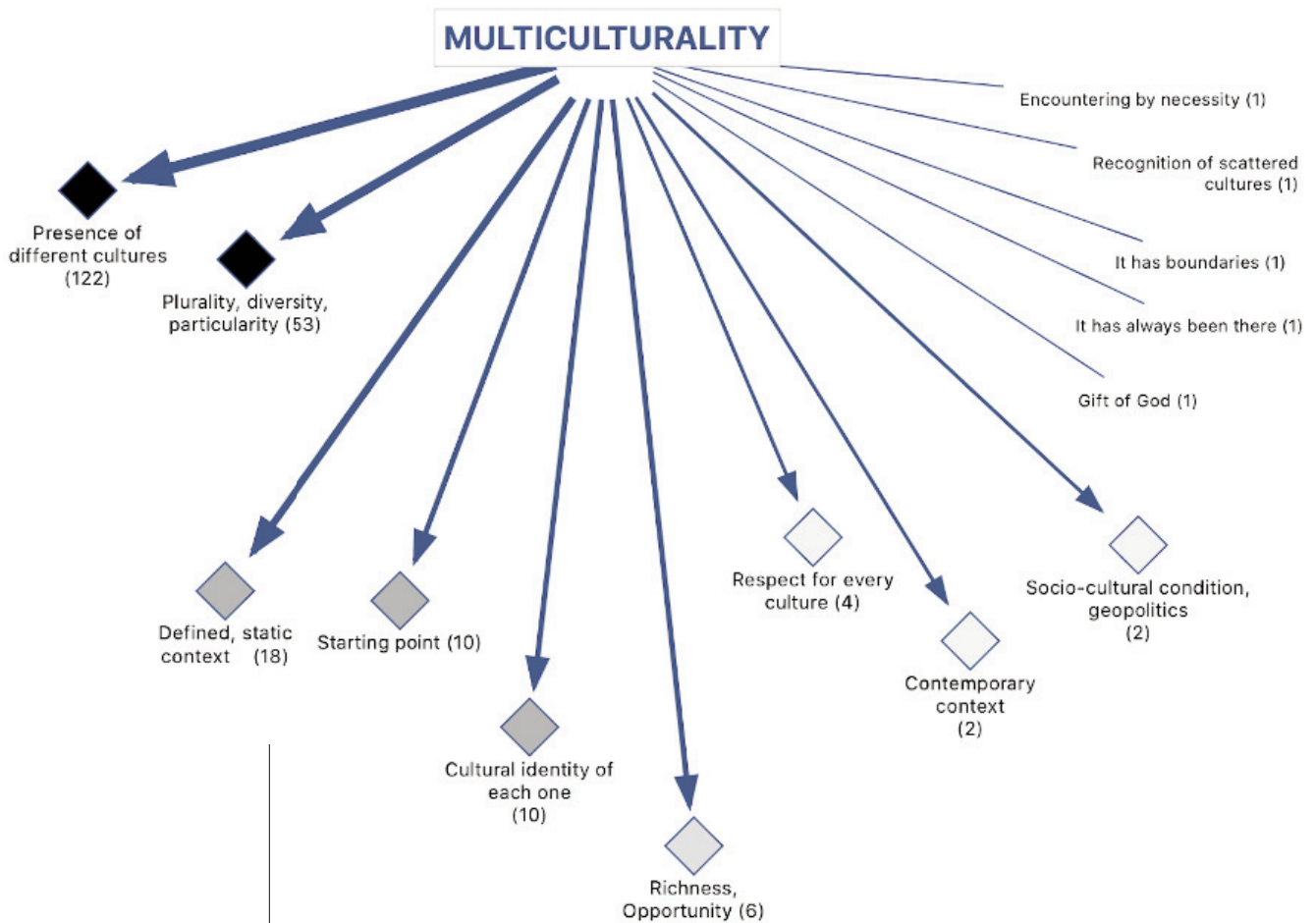
[Reduced extract in ENG: I have written “Today” for multiculturality as it appears to me to be the **characteristic of nowadays societies**, which are formed by many cultures that come together for many different reasons].

“Per me una cultura è la forma di un popolo quindi **la multiculturalità è un contesto nel mondo contemporaneo**”. (Int1a_G24_ST_F, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: To me, culture is the shape of a people, thus **multiculturality is a context of the contemporary world**].

Moving now to a code analysis based on the number of codified segments with the textual data, in Fig. 17 we report the statistics of the same categories illustrated in Fig. 16 with their absolute number of textual fragments. We can notice a high ordering agreement, with “presence of different cultures” (122 textual segments) and “plurality, diversity, particularity” (53 coded segments) again at the top.

Fig. 17 – Map of the subcodes (level 2) corresponding to the concept of multiculturality ordered according to their absolute frequency. Line width indicates the frequency of each specific subcode: the thicker the line, the higher the frequency



5.2.2 Varying degrees of intensity of interaction between different cultures

A more in-depth analysis of the concept of multiculturalism highlights an additional disagreement between participants' opinions, this time in relation to the level of interaction between different cultures.

More specifically, both in characterizing the co-presence and co-existence of cultural diversity (see also Fig. 18), the following positions are found:

1. Multiculturalism is referred to the diversity and plurality of different ways of living and interpreting reality as well as different values which:
 - a. Have some similarities, are shared, and allow for a harmonical living
 - b. Must be accepted and regulated/homologated in order to avoid any contrasts
 - c. Have limits or boundaries as they need to measure up with the belonging society.

2. A multicultural society is characterized by the co-existence of multiple cultures which:
 - a. Do not necessarily have borders
 - b. Only interact with similar cultures
 - c. Do not interact or relate to each other, either because:
 - i. They feel complete in their own culture

“E poi ognuna sento veramente che sono completa con la mia cultura e vedere la cultura di un altro mi sembra questo davvero mi sembra diverso. Questa è la multiculturalità. Questo ho sperimentato anche nella vita religiosa, nella vita comunitaria. Non ci vuole un passaggio, non è facile entrare nella cultura della mia compagna perché lei è completa con la sua cultura e io completa”.
(Int1a_G24_ST_F, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *It is not easy to enter the culture of my colleague as she is complete in her culture, and I am complete in my culture*].

- ii. There are no valid tools or knowledge on how to get in contact

“Eravamo tutti di diversi paesi uno accanto all'altro, ma senza la possibilità di accogliere la ricchezza uno dell'altro, non si sapeva nemmeno come fare”.
(Int1a_G07_DO_MF, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *We were all side by side from different countries, but we did not have the ability to welcome the richness of each other, we did not even know how to do it*].

According to Fig. 18, one can also notice that the most common opinion is that there is no relationship or interaction between the different cultures in a mere multicultural society. Furthermore, it is also commonly stated that the existing diversity should be regulated to allow peaceful co-living. Specific textual segments related to this aspect are reported in Fig. 19, in which one could observe that such regulations should occur first at a communicative level (standardization of languages).

Fig. 18 – Map of selected subcodes (level 2, 3 and 4) of the concept of multiculturalism. Line width indicates the frequency of each specific subcode: the thicker the line, the higher the frequency²⁵

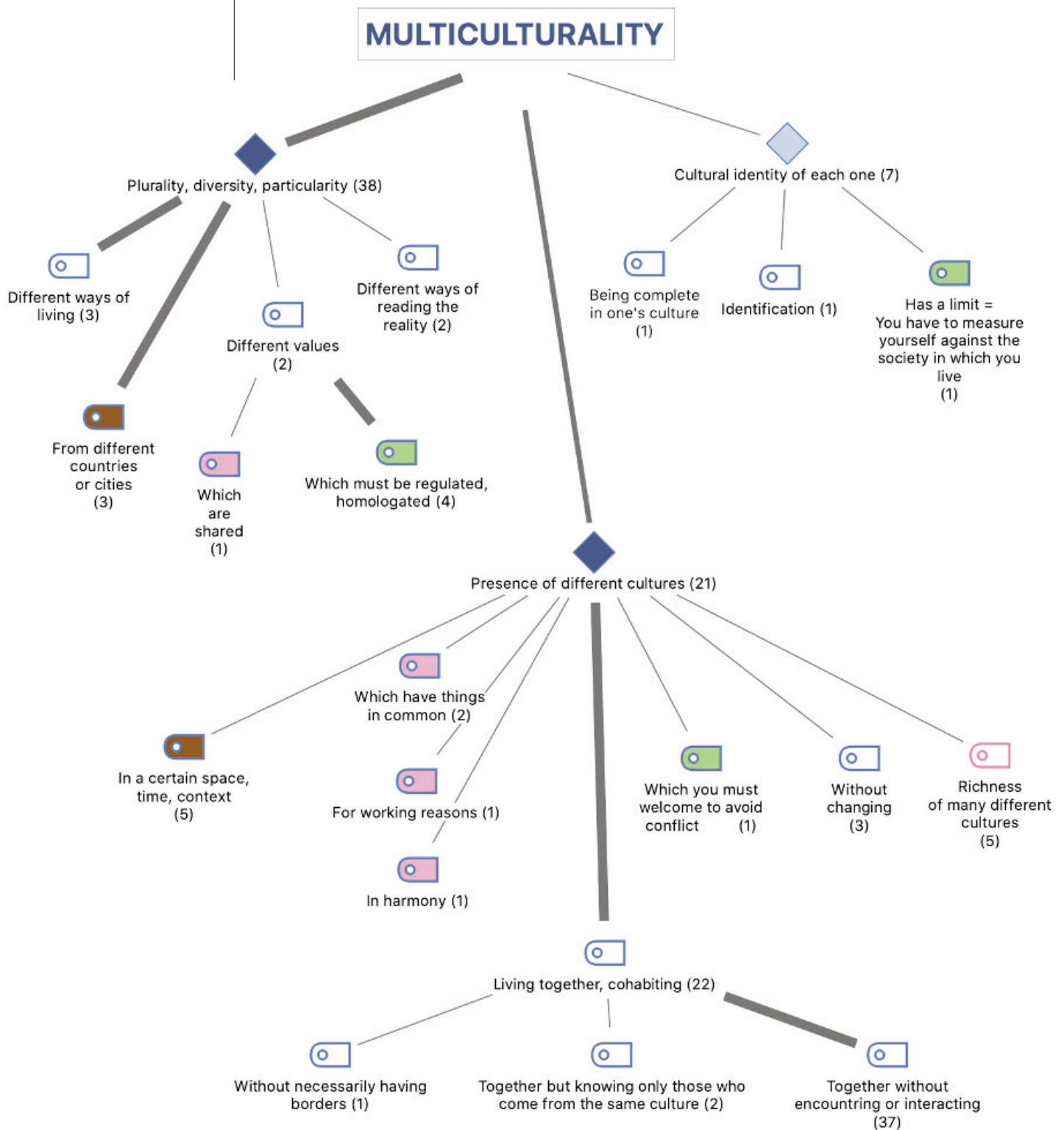
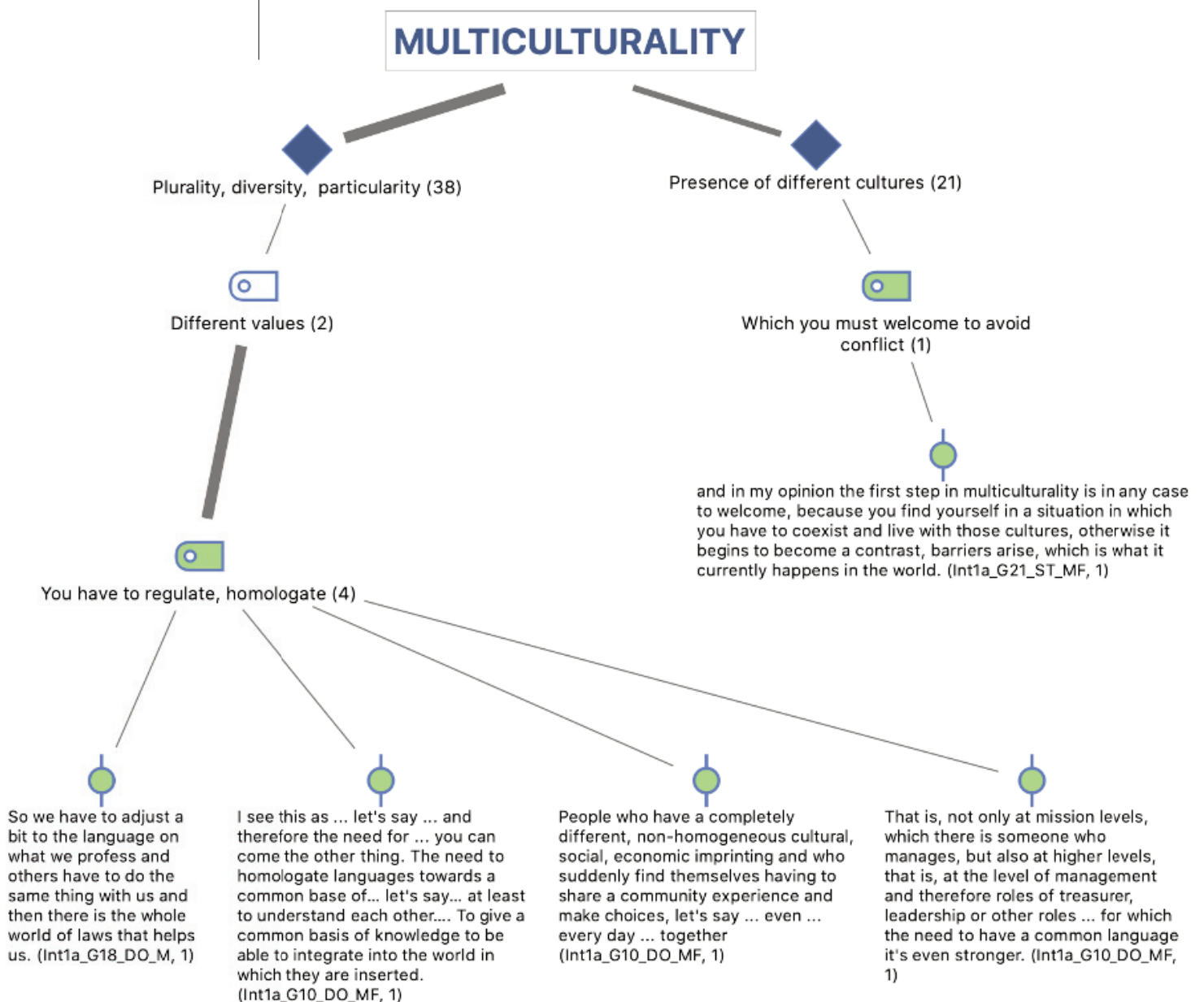


Fig. 19 – Map of selected subcodes (level 2, 3 and 4) and textual segments (ENG translation) of the concept of multiculturalism. Line width indicates the frequency of each specific subcode: the thicker the line, the higher the frequency

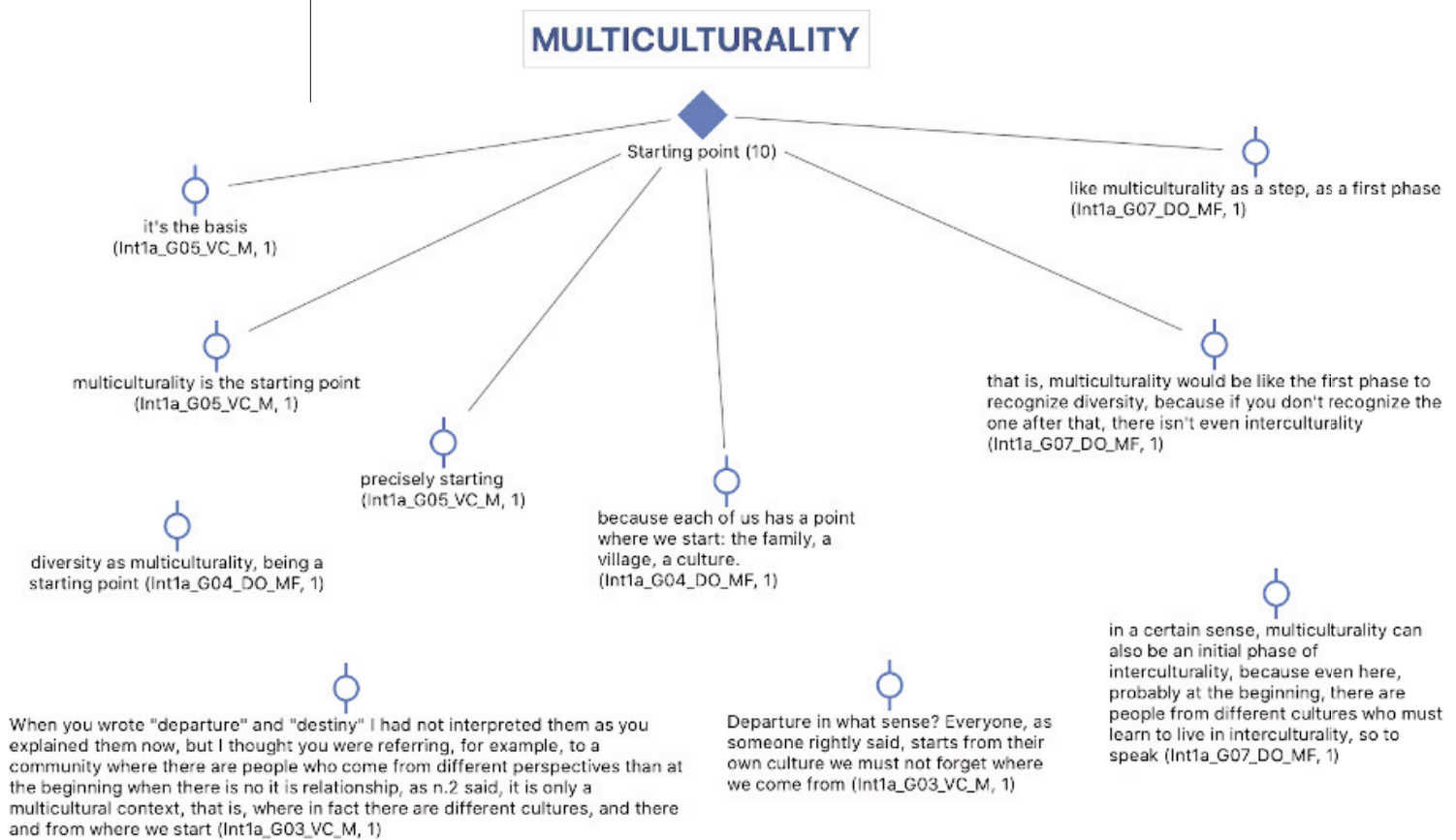


5.2.3 Starting point to live interculturality

While a general definition of multiculturalism would not involve the characteristic of being a “starting point” (multiculturalism is itself a process of territorial movements with multiple points of origin and a unique place or context of destination), it would certainly do when studied in relation to interculturality. Such a “starting point” aspect is expressed frequently and with a certain determination during the focus group interviews.

In Fig. 20 we report the codified segments which relate multiculturalism with the notion of the “starting point” just mentioned. We also refer to Fig. 15, which illustrates a clear dichotomy between “starting” and “destination” point.

Fig. 20 – Map of selected codified segments (ENG translation) with reference to the subcode “starting point” referred to the concept of multiculturalism



5.3 Interculturality

We start with the following definition of the concept of interculturality given by Pandolfi and Ottone²⁶, and then relate it to participants' view to understand how these are aligned with the underlying theory.

*«However, in contexts of rising multiculturalism, **interculturality** is a different phenomenon. It is realized with varying degrees of intensity and through long, complex processes, and involves not only acceptance and respect for the other person, in peaceful and tolerant cohabitation, but an exchange and a readiness to undergo reciprocal transformation. It constitutes a substantial, slow modification of some aspects of the presuppositions underlying our own cultural identity, perceived not in static, formal terms, but through processes of exchange, hospitality and inclusion of the culture of the other, processes which lead to an unexperienced merger and syncretism. Interculturality is perceived, here, not only as a horizon to construct but also as an awareness of the phenomena which lead to and filter down to the reconstruction of the presuppositions and assumptions underlying one's own "identity and cultural diversity". Interculturality is seen not to be the realization of an additional, in any case syncretic, static phenomenon, the production of a third, hybrid culture. Rather, it is envisaged in a dynamic and participatory mode, in a daily search for dialogue, reception, acceptance, understanding and the overcoming of conflict: collaboration and construction of a common and plural future. The future is conceived of as a reciprocal enrichment and a **dynamic reciprocal transformation**»²⁷.*

The identified key concepts include:

- Multiculturality as a basis (for interculturality)
- Realization through long and complex processes
- Acceptance and respect for the “other”
- Peaceful and tolerant cohabitation
- Reciprocal transformation, with potential changes in own cultural identity
- Reciprocal enrichment.

5.3.1 A higher depth and heterogeneity of notions

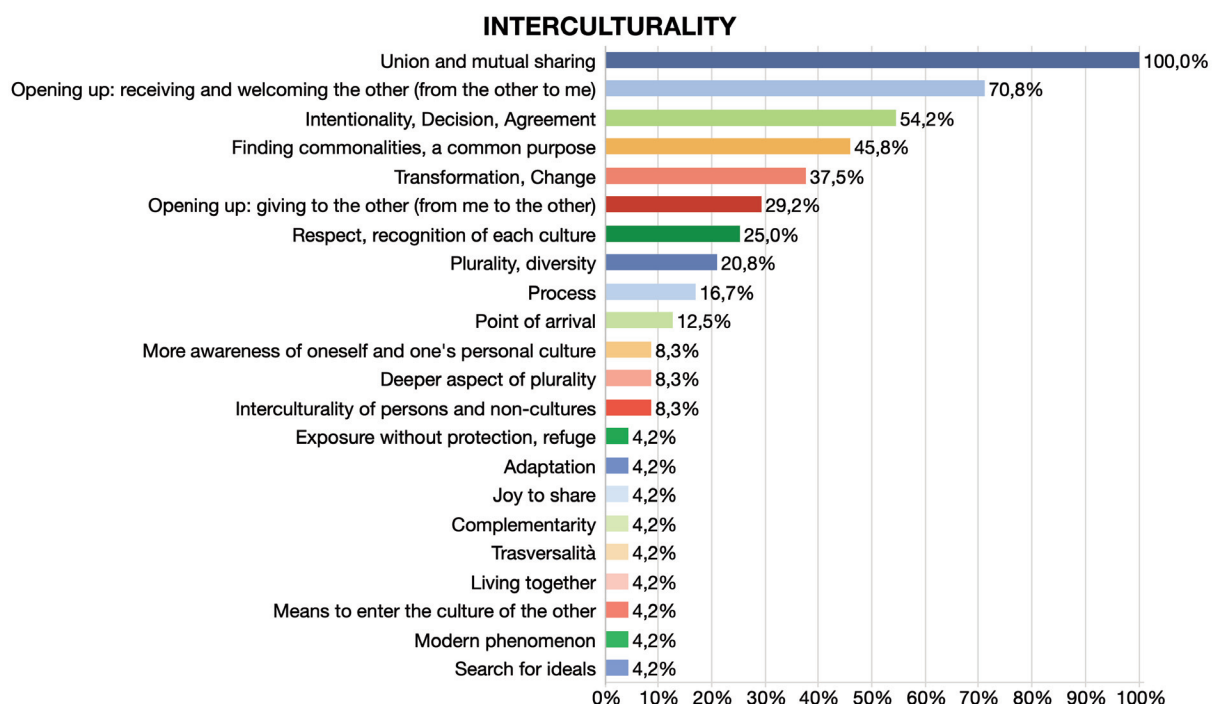
Analogously to the concept of multiculturalism, participants are again able to define the concept of interculturality and identify the key characteristics (see Fig. 21) that relate to it. However, a greater heterogeneity of opinions, terminology and images arise; see e.g.,

“Sono rimasto anche io colpito dalla varietà, dalla varietà dei termini per quanto riguarda l’interculturalità. E questa varietà di termini io la vedo come una cosa positiva perché a mio giudizio, mi auguro di non sbagliare, a mio giudizio essendo un processo, questo processo vede diversità”. (Int1a_G04_DO_MF, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *I was surprised by the variety of terminology used to characterize interculturality. And I see this variety positively, as, hopefully I am not wrong, being a process, the process evolves through diversities*].

As illustrated in Fig. 21, all transcribed documents report at least once the characteristic of “union and mutual sharing”, followed by “opening-up: receiving and welcoming the other” (70.8% of focus group transcriptions), while “opening-up: giving to the other” is only present in 29.2% of the focus groups. The direction of the concept of opening-up” has a relevant role: in fact, there is a major accent on the propensity and ability to accept and welcome the other and their culture, compared to the propensity and willingness to share with the other what belongs to us.

Fig. 21 – Statistics of focus groups’ sub-codes (level 2) corresponding to the concept of interculturality



5.3.2 Varying degrees of intensity of union and transformation

A more in-depth analysis of the subcode “union and mutual sharing”, which is covered in all transcribed focus group interviews, reveals that interculturality is the result of an encounter and exchange of different cultures. However, it should be noticed that this result, defined as an “arrival” or “destination point”, is not interpreted in a unique way. In synthesis, interculturality is viewed as a phenomenon of union and mutual sharing, which is realized through dialogue, communication, relationship, and exchange, and can lead to:

1. Preservation of personal identity, often with a greater consciousness of it

“Inter ho messo scambio, che c’è la conoscenza di un’altra cultura e mescolanza senza lasciare la cultura originaria”. (Int1a_G11_ST_MF, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *Meeting another culture, and mixing without leaving the original culture*].

“Dobbiamo interagire per poter beneficiare di quello che è diverso senza perdersi nella cultura dell’altro senza perdere la propria identità. Accogliere quello dell’altro senza che ci sia una fusione. Senza perdersi nella cultura dell’altro”. (Int1a_G12_VC_M, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *We must interact to benefit from what is different without losing ourselves in the culture of the other, without losing our own identity. Accepting the other without any type of fusion*].

2. Creating or understanding a third element or dimension

a. Which represents a synthesis

*“E invece io pensavo questa interculturalità o è andare oltre, o **creare una specie di sintesi**, cioè non ci sono le presenze parallele ma miste in qualche modo: sintesi”. (Int1a_G19_DO_M, Pos 1)*

[Reduced extract in ENG: *I thought that interculturality is something that either goes beyond, or **creates a type of synthesis**, based on which differences are not present parallelly but are mixed: synthesis*].

b. Which is not a synthesis, and may represent a greater reality

“Per me è un processo che dovrebbe portare a elaborare qualcosa di terzo, che non è né mio né tuo”. (Int1a_G08_DO_F, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *In my opinion, this is a process that should bring to the elaboration of a third element, neither mine nor yours*]

“Qualcosa di nuovo che non è una sintesi tra due culture ma un terzo richiede un processo credo che qui una elaborazione una maturazione reciproca”. (Int1a_G08_DO_F, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *Something new which is not a synthesis of two cultures but a third element*].

“Perché 1+1 invece di essere 2 si fa 3. Per dire che la prima parte l'individuo per dire rimane tale come è, la cultura rimane tale come è, però il risultato attraverso un dialogo, le due culture o tante culture lavorano con la terza idea”. (Int1a_G25_ST_F, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: Because 1+1 rather than being 2 is 3. To say that in the former case, the person and cultures remain invariant, but the result of the dialogue between two or more cultures contributes to the latter].

3. Cancellation of differences to create a single reality

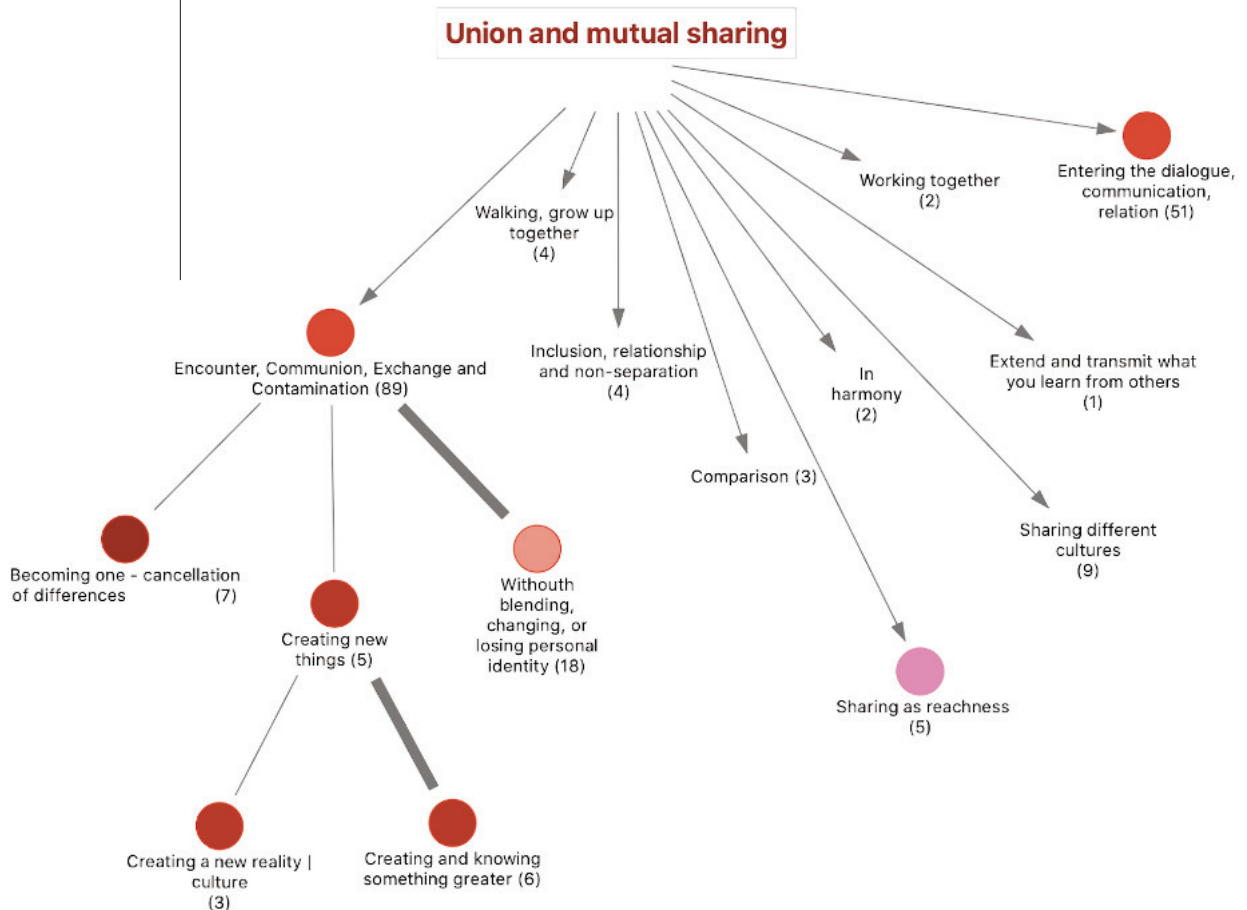
“Per interculturalità che nel collegio abbiamo i gruppi che mettono tutti insieme i paesi dell'Asia, Africa, latinoamericano e da qui da multiculturalità e quando entriamo nell'interculturalità ci fa uno; non c'è più la diversità”. (Int1a_G01_VC_F, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: From multiculturality we enter interculturality, becoming one; differences do not exist anymore].

“Ci sono momenti in cui effettivamente c'è una fusione...un incontro reale e un dialogo, la possibilità di potere fare trovare i punti in comune in cui queste realtà stanno insieme”. (Int1a_G10_DO_MF, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: There are moments in which there is actually a fusion... a real encounter and a dialogue, a possibility to find the common points in which these realities stand together].

Fig. 22 – Different points of view on the concept of “union and mutual sharing” characterizing interculturality



The temporal characterization appears to have again a certain weight in the definition of the concept. However, compared to multiculturalism, interculturalism is perceived uniquely as a “modern phenomenon”, and seems to be related to the web.

“Poi interculturalità è un fenomeno che è moderno, che sta entrando giusto a partire da internet e quant’altro. Perché le persone sono collegate in un certo modo. Quindi pure queste culture”. (Int1a_G09_VC_M, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *Then, interculturalism is a modern phenomenon, which started right after the internet and others. People are connected in a certain way, and similarly these cultures*].

Most of the focus groups recognize the dynamicity of the intercultural “process”, which becomes manifest after “transformations and changes” of our cultural identity. However, interculturalism is not a natural phenomenon anymore (i.e., not a “matter of fact” or “gift of God”) as in the context of multiculturalism. Instead, it is guided by a process of “intentionality, decision, agreement” and a search for “commonalities, a common purpose”, thus, it represents a direct action from the interested parts, a “commitment” from those who live together.

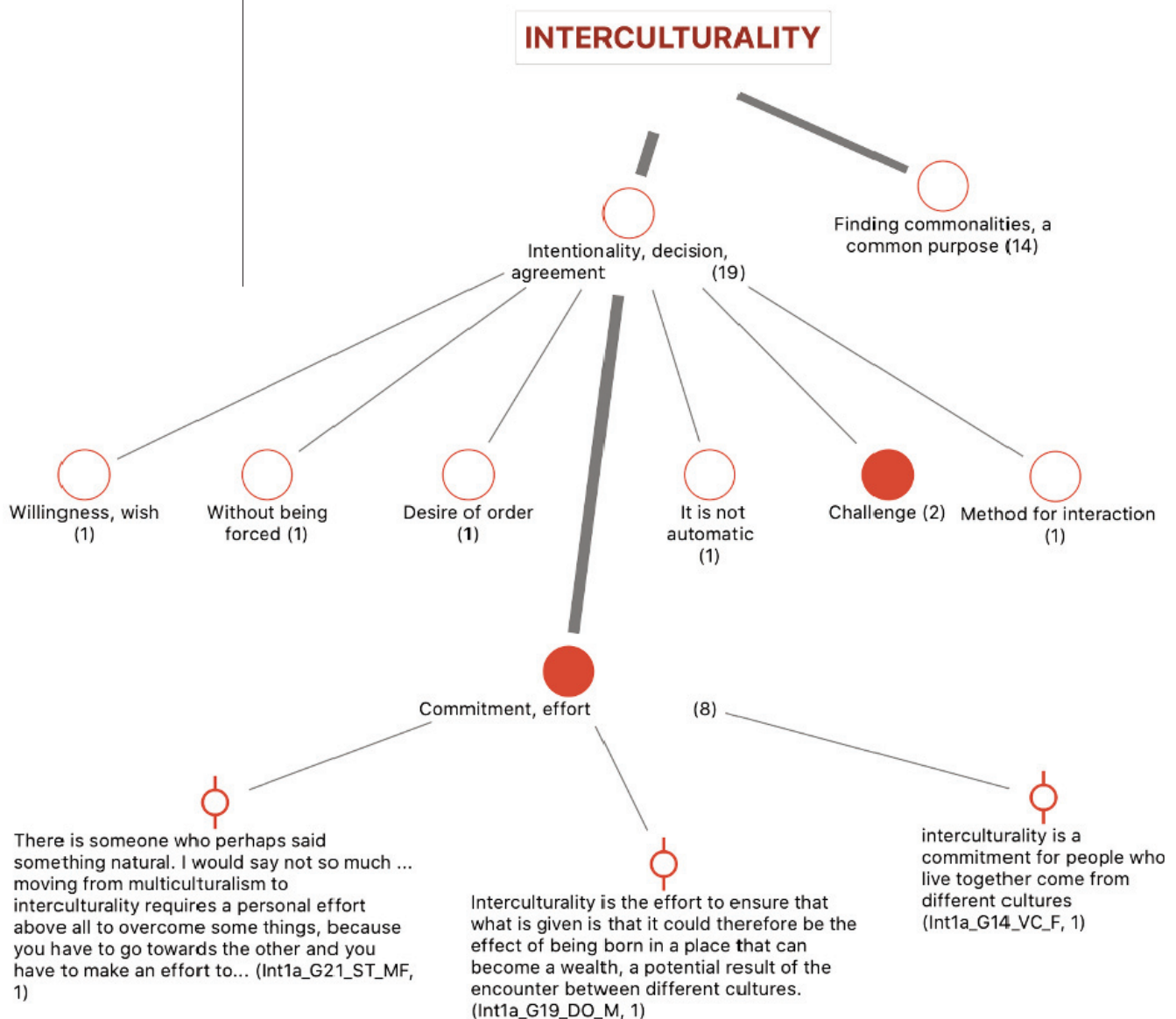
Sometimes intentions and agreements do not have an easy path and must be accompanied by a greater engagement and “effort”, often becoming a “challenge” (as shown in Fig. 23).

“L’interculturalità è lo sforzo di far sì che ciò che è dato di fatto, è che quindi potrebbe essere l’effetto del fatto di essere nati in un posto, possa diventare una ricchezza, una potenzialità frutto dell’incontro tra culture diverse”. (Int1a_G19_DO_M, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *Interculturalism is the effort of letting a matter of fact become a richness, a potentiality resulting from the encounter of different cultures*].

Such personal efforts enable thus the possibility of multiculturalism to become richness if well exploited.

Fig. 23 – Interculturality and “Intentionality, decision, agreement” and “Challenge”: codes, subcodes and segments (ENG translation)



A fundamental characteristic of interculturality is to have a multicultural society as its basis (notice that this was previously depicted in Section 5.1 – Fig. 15) and be realized in a context of “plurality, diversity”. However, now such a “plurality, diversity” is part of a union and mutual sharing, a journey of reciprocal transformation, as illustrated in Fig. 24, and as reported in the following segments.

“La multiculturalità in un certo senso può essere anche una fase iniziale dell’interculturalità, perché anche qui probabilmente all’inizio si trovano persone di culture diverse che devono imparare a vivere in interculturalità diciamo così, cioè trasformare quella diversità in un’occasione di incontro e di conoscenza più profonda”. (Int1a_G07_DO_MF, Pos 1)

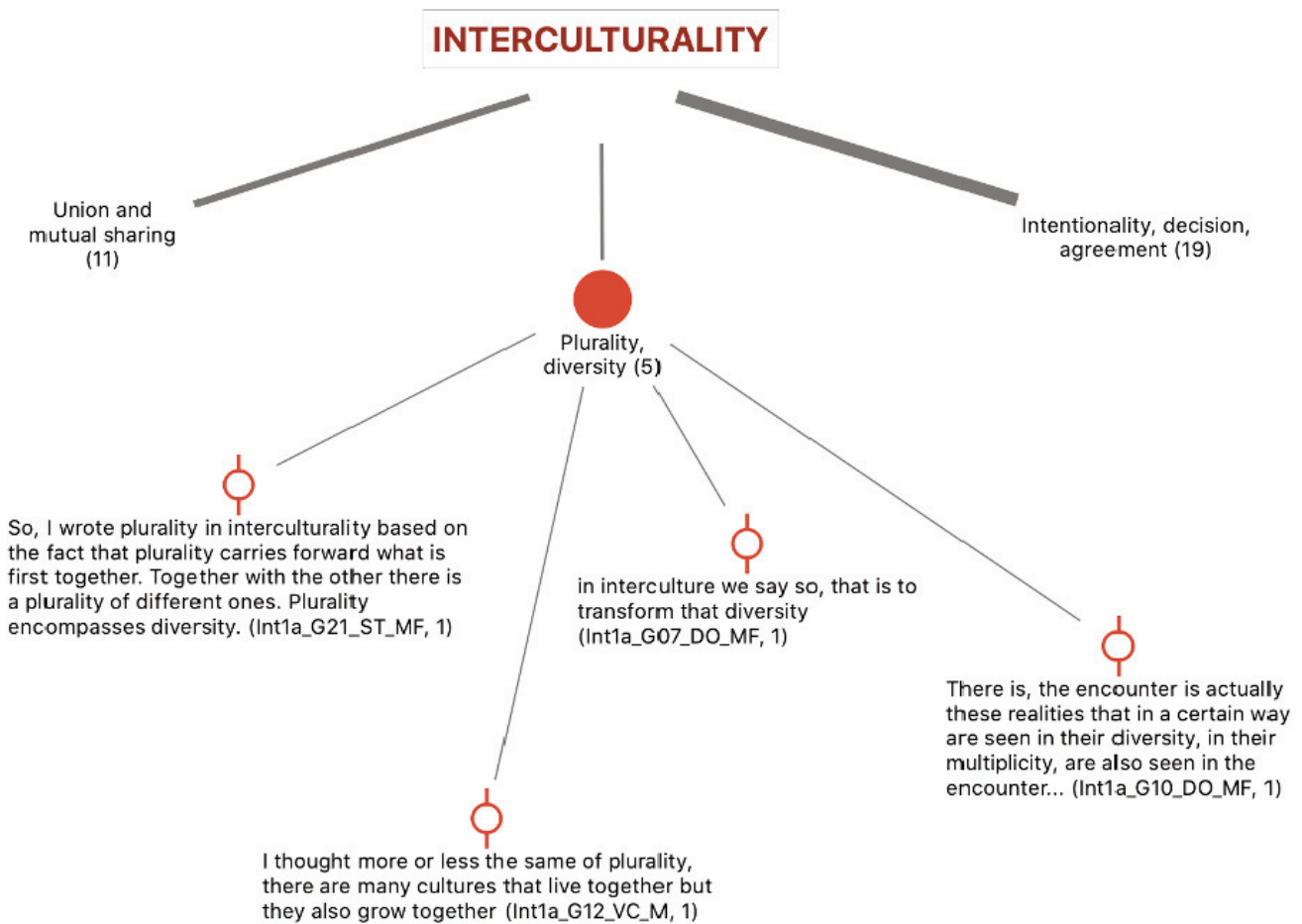
[Reduced extract in ENG: *Multiculturality, in a certain sense, can be regarded as the initial phase of interculturality, as the former is characterized by people of different cultures that must learn to live interculturality, namely, to transform the initial diversity into an opportunity of encounter and deeper understanding*].

“lo pensavo più o meno lo stesso della pluralità, ci sono tante culture che vivono insieme però crescono anche insieme”. (Int1a_G12_VC_M, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *There exist many cultures which co-exist and grow together*].

Now, the concepts of “plurality, diversity” appear to be deeper and more dynamic with respect to the ones introduced for describing multiculturalism: “growing together”, “transformation”, and “encounter”.

Fig. 24 – Map of selected subcodes and codified segments (ENG translation) with reference to the concept of “plurality, diversity” referred to interculturality



5.3.3 A comparison among focus groups of different gender

Generally, no relevant differences are noticed when comparing focus groups with respect to the two study variables of gender and type of community. An extensive comparison is reported in the Appendix (Tab. A3 and Tab. A4); here, we focus on the most substantial results shown in Fig. 25.

More specifically, focus groups of female participants only are more likely to highlight the aspect of “enrichment” dictated by the intercultural process. To illustrate, the subcode “transformation, change” is present in 16.7% of the of female focus groups and in 28.6% of male focus groups, but only in female focus groups it is seen as an “improvement, enrichment”. Values go from 50% in female groups only, to 27.3% of mixed groups and 0% of male groups only.

Fig. 25 – Comparison among focus groups with respect to variable “Gender”

| | SESSO = F | SESSO = M | SESSO = MF | Totale |
|--|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| INTERCULTURALISM | | | | |
| Process | 16,7% | 14,3% | 18,2% | 16,7% |
| Growth | 16,7% | | 9,1% | 8,3% |
| Transformation, Change | 16,7% | 28,6% | 18,2% | 20,8% |
| Improvement, enrichment | 50,0% | | 27,3% | 25,0% |
| Joy to share | 16,7% | | | 4,2% |
| Union and mutual sharing | 50,0% | 42,9% | 9,1% | 29,2% |
| Entering the dialogue, communication, relation | 66,7% | 100,0% | 72,7% | 79,2% |
| As enrichment | 33,3% | | 36,4% | 25,0% |
| Encounter, Communion, Exchange and Contamination | 100,0% | 100,0% | 81,8% | 91,7% |
| Becoming one - cancellation of differences | 33,3% | 28,6% | 9,1% | 20,8% |
| Synthesis | | 14,3% | | 4,2% |
| Creating new things | 33,3% | 14,3% | | 12,5% |
| Creating a new reality, culture | | 14,3% | 18,2% | 12,5% |
| Creating and knowing something greater | 33,3% | | 18,2% | 16,7% |
| What is created comes from everyone = richness | 16,7% | | | 4,2% |
| Without blending, changing or losing the personal identity | 50,0% | 42,9% | 72,7% | 58,3% |
| Sharing as enrichment | 33,3% | 14,3% | 18,2% | 20,8% |
| Opening up: giving to the other (from me to the other) | 33,3% | 14,3% | 9,1% | 16,7% |
| Giving: sharing own belongings | 33,3% | 14,3% | | 12,5% |
| Communicate your identity | | | 9,1% | 4,2% |
| Enrich others by sharing | 16,7% | 14,3% | | 8,3% |
| Opening up: receiving and welcoming the other (from the other to me) | 33,3% | 28,6% | 18,2% | 25,0% |
| Taking the good things of the other | 16,7% | | | 4,2% |
| Perfecting and enriching oneself with other cultures | 50,0% | 28,6% | 18,2% | 29,2% |
| Accepting others and diversity | 33,3% | | 9,1% | 12,5% |
| Valuing other cultures | 16,7% | | | 4,2% |
| Accepting what is different even if it is difficult | | 14,3% | | 4,2% |
| Welcoming diversity (and the other) = richness | 16,7% | 14,3% | 27,3% | 20,8% |
| Σ SOMMA | 816,7% | 542,9% | 500,0% | 591,7% |
| # N = Documenti/Partecipante | 6 (25,0%) | 7 (29,2%) | 11 (45,8%) | 24 (100,0%) |

6 Problems, opportunities and necessary competences to promote interculturality

6.1 Problems and limitations

Although the analysis of potential problems and limits of multiculturalism does not represent a central goal of this work, a few reflections that arose during the first thematic focus group interview allow us to reconstruct a list of potential elements useful for such analysis.

In Fig. 26 we provide a general overview, while in Fig. 27 and Fig. 28 we characterize the potential problems in relation to the multicultural and intercultural phenomenon, respectively.

Fig. 26 – Code cloud of potential problems related to multicultural and intercultural contexts



Fig. 27 – Potential problems related to multicultural contexts

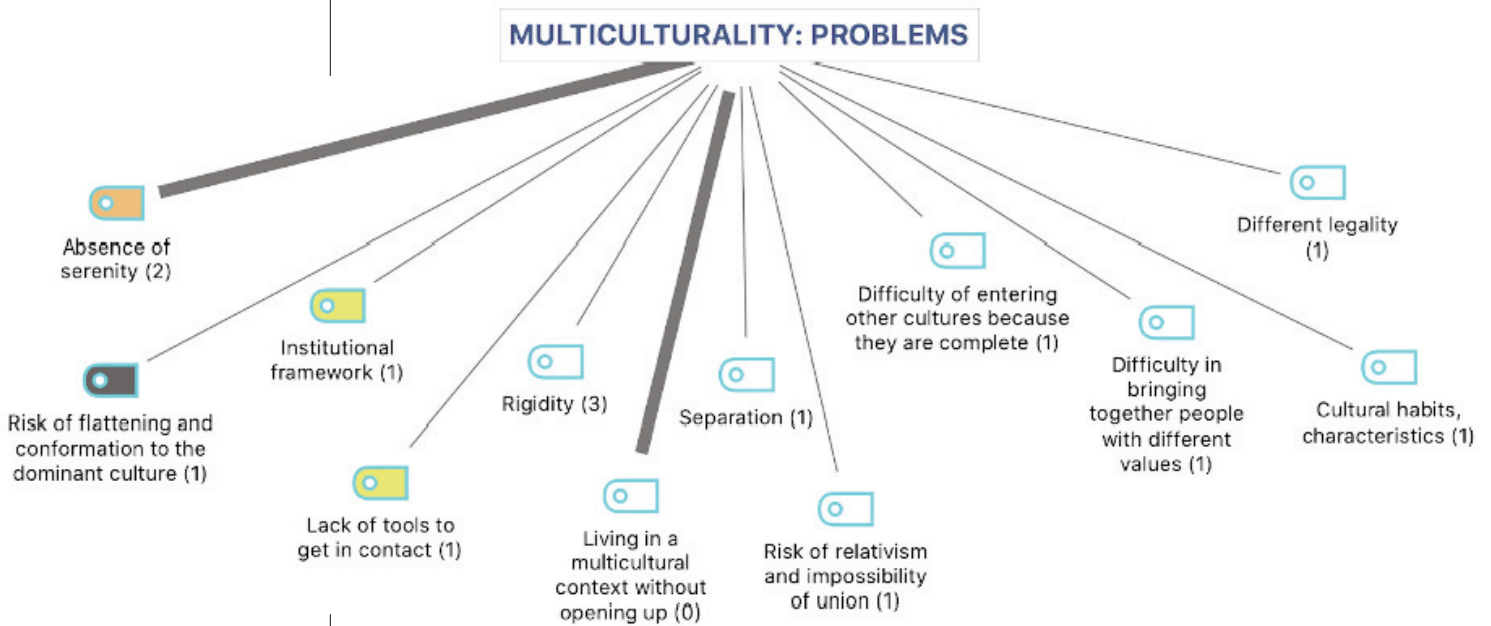
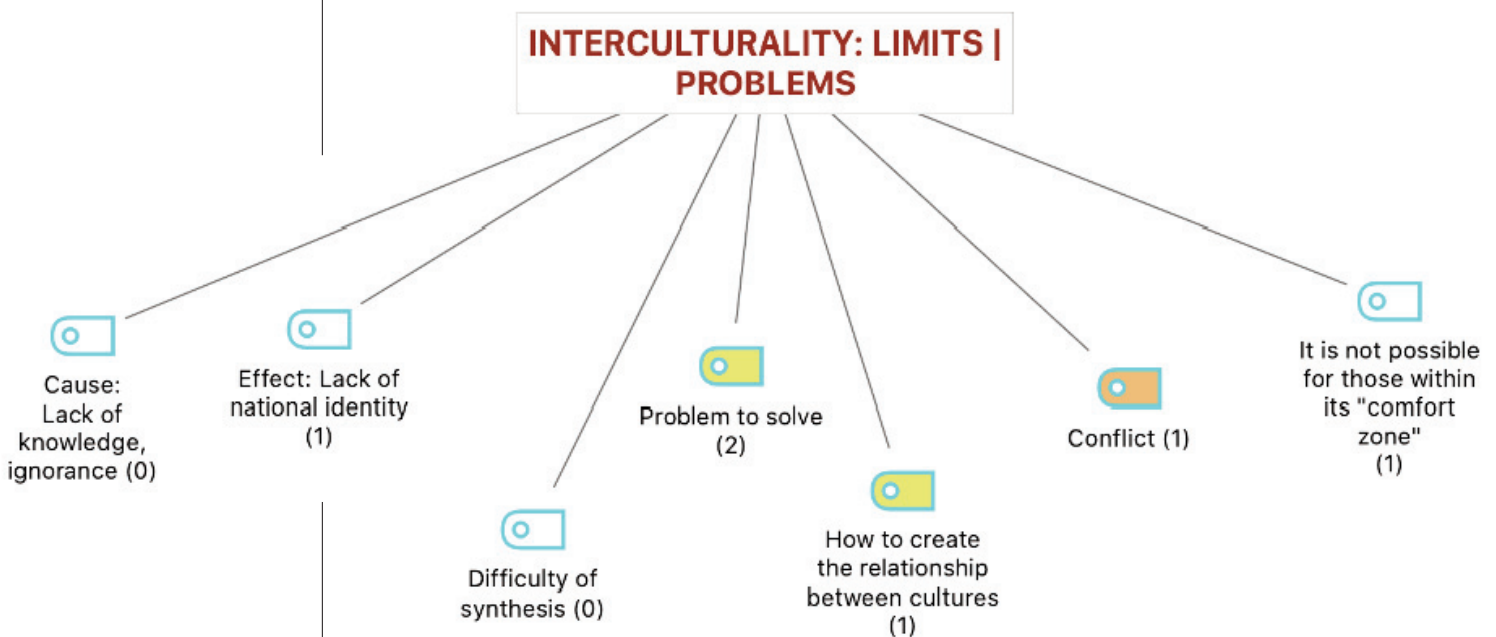
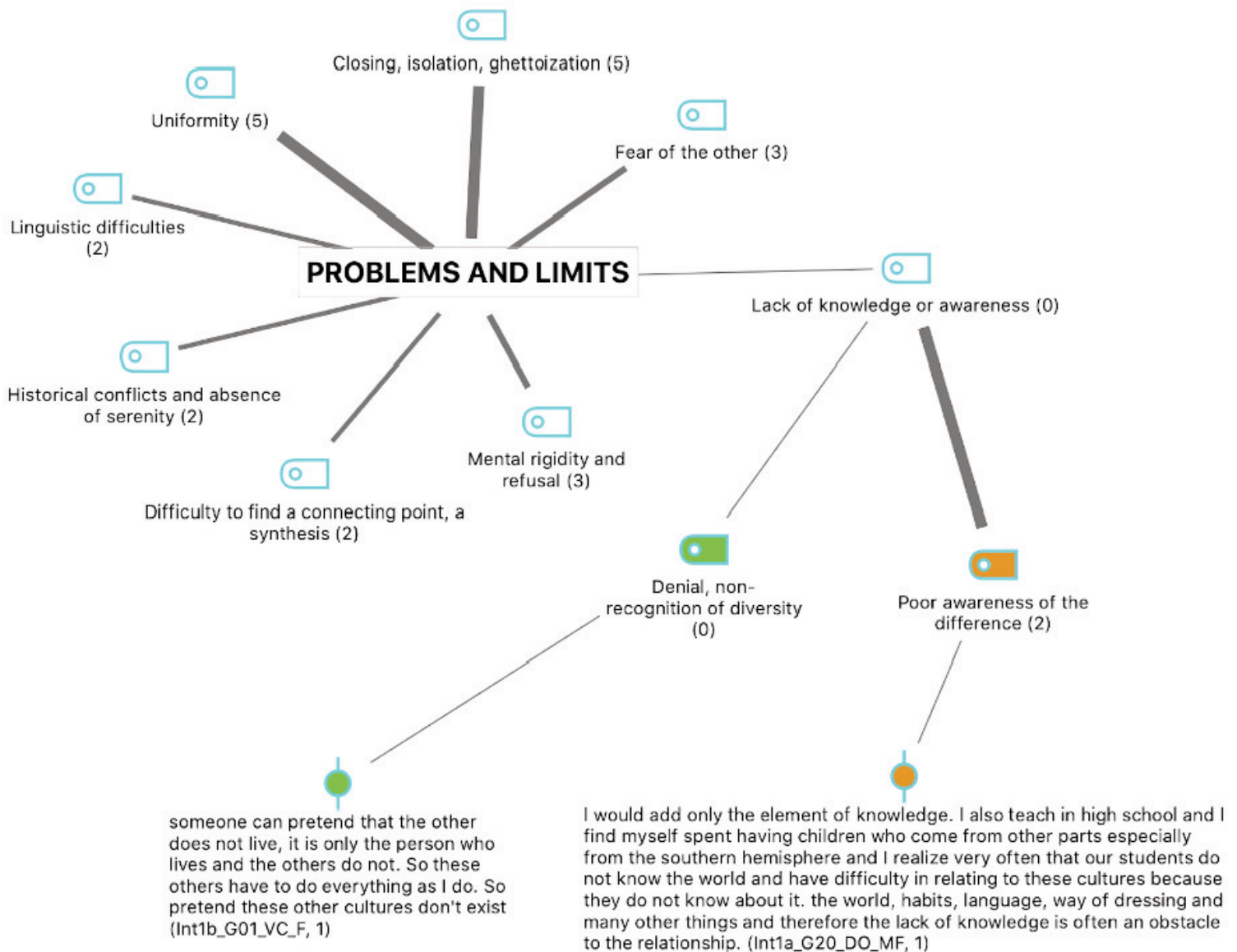


Fig. 28 – Potential problems related to intercultural contexts



We notice, however, that the boundary between the problems related to multiculturalism and the problems related to interculturalism is not always clear. For this reason, we primarily advise the more general integrated map shown in Fig. 26 and Fig. 29.

Fig. 29 – Potential problems related to multicultural and intercultural contexts



Based on what was observed in the textual data, we report a summary of the problems highlighted by the participants, to be understood as **causes and limits for the realization of interculturality**:

1. Problems related to an individual person:
 - a. Poor knowledge and consciousness of the other
 - b. Mental rigidity and denial:
 - i. Fear of the other
 - ii. Feeling different or stranger
 - iii. Feeling complete and safe in the own culture
 - c. Poor collaboration
 - d. Lack of tools and methods
2. Problems related to culture and history:
 - a. Existence of historical conflicts
 - b. Different cultural characteristics (values, religions, languages)
 - c. Different legalities

3. Problems related to the institutional framework:
 - a. Lack of instruments
 - b. Lack of adequate measures and laws
 - c. Tendency towards separation
 - d. Poor collaboration.

Moving now to the problems that arose as a **consequence** of multicultural contexts, the main aspects are:

1. The possibility or risk of relativism, and a consequent absence of serenity, agreements, and national identity.

“Però molto spesso si rischia di slittare in un relativismo perché in un’accezione del multiculturalismo si arriva a sostenere l’impossibilità dell’unificazione tra le sub-culture, cioè quello appartiene ad una certa cultura e non può cambiare, deve essere accettato così come è”. (Int1a_G18_DO_M, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *There is a risk to jump into relativism, as the notion of multiculturalism alludes to the impossibility of unification of subcultures, namely, one belongs to one culture and it cannot change, it must be accepted as it is*].

2. The risk of uniformity and flattening, with a consequent absence of personal identity

“Di solito la nostra tendenza è di formare una uniformità, l’altra doveva fare come io faccio o l’altra doveva vivere come io vivo”. (Int1a_G01_VC_F, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *Usually, our tendency is to create uniformity, the other must do as I do and the other must live as I live*].

The discussion about the opportunities offered by multicultural contexts is only touched on during the interviews. The main accent is placed on the richness offered by the confrontation between different cultures and the role this confrontation has for personal enhancements by improving the knowledge one has of the personal and others’ cultures, as expressed in the following lines.

“Mi rendo conto che sto diventando in qualche modo più me stesso, sempre più mi rendo conto della mia cultura d’origine diciamo”. (Int1a_G07_DO_MF, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *I realize that I am becoming more myself, namely I am more aware of my culture of origin*].

6.2 Competences to promote interculturality

Although the research question of this work is primarily focused on the two key concepts of multiculturalism and interculturality, several interesting aspects emerge on the potential competences to promote interculturality in multicultural contexts.

In particular, we identify four/five areas (as also illustrated in Fig. 30), represented by:

1. Promotion of individual/personal competences
 - a. Enhancement of knowledge and awareness

“Io aggiungerei solamente l’elemento della conoscenza. Io insegno pure alle scuole superiori e mi ritrovo spesso ad avere ragazzi che vengono da altre parti soprattutto dal sud del mondo e mi rendo conto con molta frequenza che i no-

stri alunni non conoscono il mondo e hanno difficoltà a relazionarsi con queste culture perché non ne conoscono il mondo, le abitudini il linguaggio, il modo di vestire e tante altre cose e quindi la mancanza di conoscenza è spesso un ostacolo alla relazione". (Int1a_G20_DO_MF, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *The lack of knowledge is often an obstacle for a relationship*].

"poi la consapevolezza di formare parte di qualcosa di una comunità e di non essere dominante nel senso dominante che non c'è una cultura che domina le altre". (Int1a_G14_VC_F, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *The awareness of being part of something, a community, and of not dominating, as there are no cultures that dominate other cultures*].

b. Consciousness and the emotional sphere

"io faccio un passo avanti verso l'interculturalità e il mezzo per fare questo passo, è l'amicizia. Anche se siamo nelle nostre aule di università, io posso avere il massimo livello di conoscenza, ma per l'amicizia io devo uscire da me stesso e così faccio amicizia con gli altri". (Int1a_G21_ST_MF, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *I take a step towards interculturality and the means of realizing it is through friendship. [...] I need to get out of myself to make friends*].

"la conoscenza ma non solo la conoscenza come informazione perché questo sarebbe multiculturalità ma una conoscenza che va con un atteggiamento di apertura verso l'altro un'apertura che non ha paura e implica un atteggiamento di profondo rispetto e di moralizzazione implica una coscienza di essere comunità non solo fisicamente". (Int1a_G14_VC_F, Pos 1)

[Reduced extract in ENG: *Not only the knowledge as information, as this would be limited to multiculturality, but a knowledge that has an aptitude of opening up towards the other, without fear*].

2. Planning and identification/creation of tools

"Quindi penso che per passare dalla multiculturalità bisogna fare un progetto, bisogna avere degli strumenti che aiutano". (Int1a_G07_DO_MF, Pos 1)

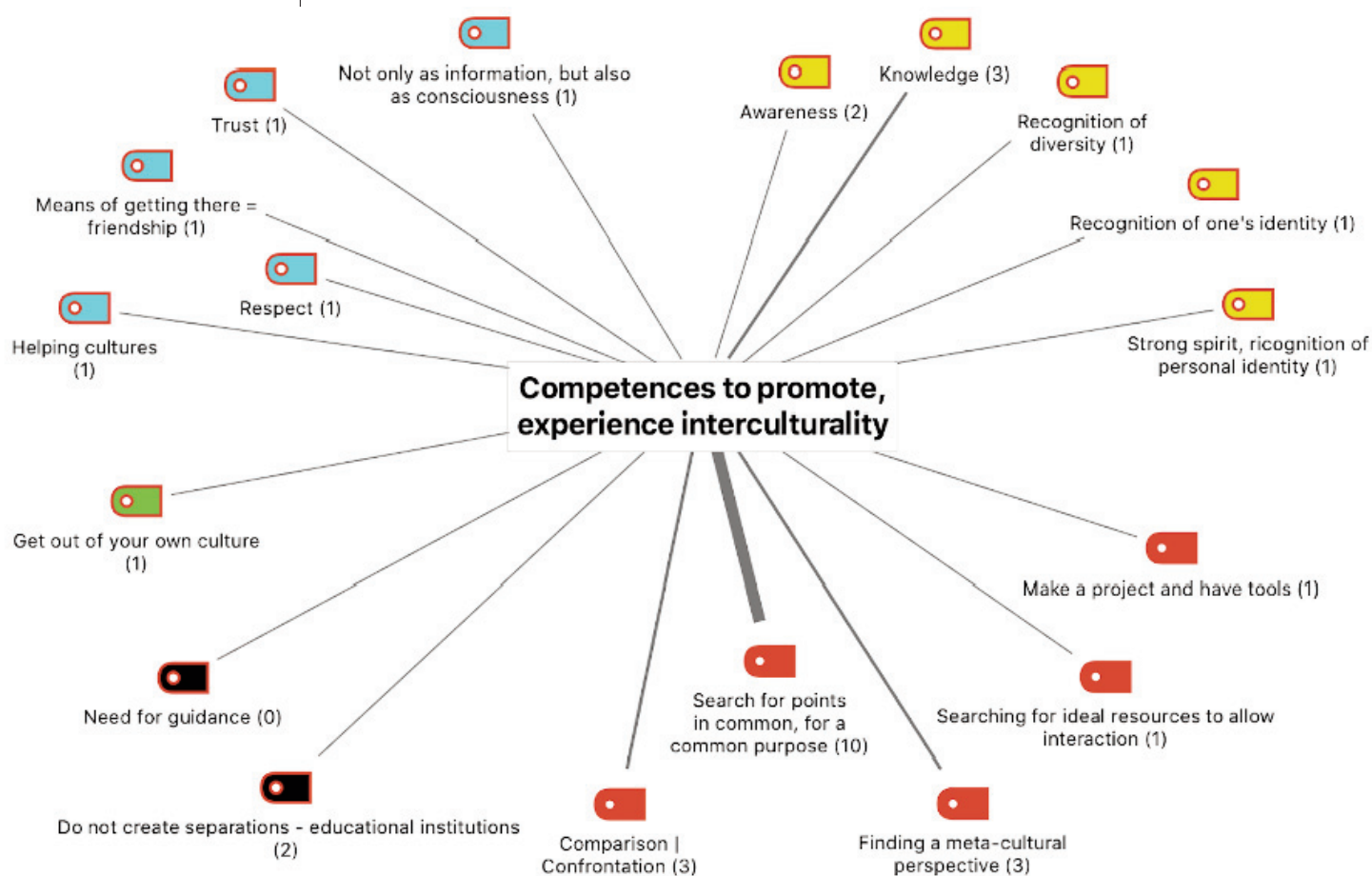
[ENG: *To switch from multiculturality (to interculturality) it is necessary to make a plan and to have a set of tools that may help*].

3. Institution and regulation

"Per cui professori devono per forza anche stare con gli studenti, e gli studenti non devono essere compartimentati in lingue o culture diverse ma insieme no, sennò non vedo come può nascere un'interculturalità, se non in senso artificiale". (Int1a_G07_DO_MF, Pos 1)

[ENG: *Professors must necessarily stay with students, and students must not be partitioned into different languages or cultures, but must stay together, otherwise, I cannot see how interculturality could be realized unless in an artificial way*].

Fig. 30 – Potential problems related to multicultural and intercultural contexts



7

Conclusions

Multiculturality In general, participants recognize the role of multiculturalism: multiculturalism as a basis of interculturality, the opportunities it offers, and at the same time, the potential problems and limits that should be overcome, at both an individual and institutional level. It appears completely clear that the concept of multiculturalism has in the first place the characteristic of diversity and plurality, within a certain space, time, and context. However, it is also subject to a lack of exchange, encounter, and relationship.

Multiculturalism is seen as a matter of fact, a determined and static nature of co-presence. Communication and sharing are relatively minimal.

The common (prevalent) opinion is that a multicultural context as such is not necessarily characterized by any type of encounter and relationship between the different cultures, and that diversity should be regulated and homologated to allow peaceful living. It is also interesting to notice that such a regularization should take place especially at the level of communication (language).

Interculturality Participants are able to recognize and describe with a high degree of accuracy the opportunities and richness of the phenomenon of interest, as well as the characteristics at the basis of an intercultural society. Particularly, all focus groups point to the relevant role of the union and mutual sharing among different cultures, with a great accent on the potential transformations that involve the interested individuals.

However, there also emerge some contrasts of opinions in relation to the final realization and ultimate result this union, sharing and individual transformation leads to.

In synthesis, interculturality is seen as a phenomenon of union and mutual sharing, which occurs through dialogue, communication, relationship, and exchange, and may determine different degrees of individual transformation, going from a better awareness of each one's personal identity and its reinforcement, to complete dissipation of differences and creation of a unique reality.

A number of images that compare the two key concepts of this work are reported in the following Fig. 31.

Fig. 31 – Images that compare the two key concepts of interest: multiculturalism and interculturality

Chaos (no form) VS Harmony (form)
Separate houses VS Communicating houses
Multiculturalism VS Interculturality
White light VS Rainbow World VS China
1+1 = 2 VS 1+1 = 3 Matter VS Form Pile of bricks VS House
Minestrone VS Salad bowl Mixed colors VS defined colors
Matter of fact (static) VS Action (dynamic)
Society VS Community
Family VS International community
Universities yesterday VS Today

Problems and competences to promote interculturality Although this analysis does not represent a central goal of this work, the survey allows for building a clear synthesis of the potential problems characterizing a multicultural society and the main limits in implementing a process of interculturality. These refer to individual aspects (knowledge, fear of the other), cultural and social aspects (historical conflicts, different values, and legitimacies), and institutional aspects (lack of adequate measures and laws).

The potential problems also suggest a number of solutions (competences and skills) to be developed and additional aspects to act on in order to promote interculturality. These include personal competences (improvement of the knowledge, awareness, and consciousness, as well as emotional education), or measures to be adopted by institutions and instruments to be provided to individuals belonging to multicultural societies.





Appendix

Tab. A1 – Full codebook of the analyses textual data

| | |
|---|----------|
| 1. Multiculturalism VS Interculturality | 0 |
| 1.1 Multiculturalism = necessary condition for interculturality | 6 |
| 1.2 Starting point VS Destination point | 3 |
| 1.3 Different realities | 1 |
| 1.4 Static VS Dynamic | 2 |
| 1.5 Used as synonyms | 5 |
| 1.6 IMAGES 0 | |
| 1.6.1 White light VS Rainbow | 1 |
| 1.6.2 Mixed colors VS defined colors | 1 |
| 1.6.3 Chaos (no form) VS Harmony (form) | 1 |
| 1.6.4 Society VS Community | 1 |
| 1.6.5 Minestrone VS Salad bowl | 1 |
| 1.6.6 Pile of bricks VS House | 1 |
| 1.6.7 Matter of fact (static) VS Action (dynamic) | 2 |
| 1.6.8 Matter VS Form | 1 |
| 1.6.9 Universities yesterday VS Today | 1 |
| 1.6.10 Separate houses VS Communicating houses | 1 |
| 1.6.11 Family VS International community | 1 |
| 1.6.12 $1 + 1 = 2$ VS $1 + 1 = 3$ | 1 |
| 1.6.13 World VS China | 1 |
| 2. No Multiculturalism VS Multiculturalism vs Interculturality | 1 |
| 3. Competences to promote, experience interculture | 0 |
| 3.1 Get out of your own culture | 1 |
| 3.2 Respect | 1 |
| 3.3 Search for ideal resources to allow interaction | 1 |
| 3.4 Need for guidance | 0 |
| 3.5 Trust | 1 |
| 3.6 Make a project and have tools | 1 |
| 3.7 Recognition of diversity | 1 |
| 3.8 Do not create separations – training institutions | 2 |
| 3.9 Comparison Confrontation | 3 |
| 3.10 Recognition of one's identity | 1 |
| 3.11 Helping cultures | 1 |
| 3.12 Strong spirit, recognition of personal identity | 1 |
| 3.13 Finding a meta-cultural perspective | 3 |
| 3.14 Search for points in common, for a common purpose | 10 |
| 3.15 Awareness | 2 |
| 3.16 Knowledge | 3 |
| 3.16.1 Not only as information, but also as consciousness | 1 |
| 3.17 Means of getting there = friendship | 1 |
| 4. INTERCULTURALITY | 0 |
| 4.1 Search for ideals | 1 |
| 4.2 Adaptation | 1 |

| | |
|---|---|
| 4.3 Living together | 2 |
| 4.4 Modern phenomenon | 1 |
| 4.5 More awareness of oneself and one's personal culture | 2 |
| 4.6 Exposure without protection, refuge | 1 |
| 4.7 Process | 6 |
| 4.7.1 Growth | 2 |
| 4.8 Complementarity | 1 |
| 4.9 Transversality | 1 |
| 4.10 Deeper aspect of plurality | 2 |
| 4.11 Means to enter the culture of the other | 1 |
| 4.12 Interculturality of persons and non-cultures | 3 |
| 4.13 LIMITS PROBLEMS | 0 |
| 4.13.1 It is not possible for those within its "comfort zone" | 1 |
| 4.13.2 How to create the relationship between cultures | 1 |
| 4.13.3 Problem to solve | 1 |
| 4.13.4 Conflict | 1 |
| 4.13.5 Difficulty of synthesis | 1 |
| 4.13.6 Effect: Lack of national identity | 1 |
| 4.13.7 Cause: Lack of knowledge, ignorance | 1 |
| 4.14 Plurality, diversity | 5 |
| 4.15 Respect, recognition of each culture | 4 |
| 4.15.1 Without imposing on others | 1 |
| 4.15.2 Without being superior | 6 |
| 4.16 Transformation, Change | 6 |
| 4.16.1 Improvement, enrichment | 6 |
| 4.17 Joy to share | 1 |
| 4.18 IMAGE | 0 |
| 4.18.1 Horizon | 1 |
| 4.18.2 Child | 1 |
| 4.18.3 Identity | 1 |
| 4.18.4 Wisdom | 1 |
| 4.18.5 Archipelago of islands | 1 |
| 4.18.6 House, more systematic set of bricks | 1 |
| 4.18.7 Meltingpot | 1 |
| 4.18.8 Mosaic | 1 |
| 4.18.9 Cappuccino | 1 |
| 4.18.10 International community | 1 |
| 4.18.11 Parresia: a single spiritual family | 1 |
| 4.18.12 Soul | 1 |
| 4.18.13 Intertwining | 4 |
| 4.18.14 Network of connections | 1 |
| 4.18.15 People: going together to do something | 1 |
| 4.19 Point of arrival | 4 |
| 4.20 EXAMPLES | 0 |
| 4.20.1 Language | 1 |
| 4.20.2 Lessons | 3 |
| 4.20.3 Holidays | 1 |
| 4.20.4 Rome today | 1 |
| 4.20.5 Dances | 2 |
| 4.20.6 Greeting | 1 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 4.20.7 Food | 3 |
| 4.21 Union and mutual sharing | 11 |
| 4.21.1 Comparison | 3 |
| 4.21.2 Entering the dialogue, communication, relation | 44 |
| 4.21.2.1 As enrichment | 7 |
| 4.21.3 Extend and transmit what you learn from others | 1 |
| 4.21.4 In harmony | 2 |
| 4.21.5 Inclusion, relationship and non-separation | 4 |
| 4.21.6 Walking, grow up together | 4 |
| 4.21.7 Doing work together | 2 |
| 4.21.8 Encounter, Communion, Exchange and Contamination | 48 |
| 4.21.8.1 Becoming one – cancellation of differences | 7 |
| 4.21.8.1.1 Synthesis | 1 |
| 4.21.8.2 Creating new things | 5 |
| 4.21.8.2.1 Creating a new reality, culture | 3 |
| 4.21.8.2.2 Creating and knowing something greater | 6 |
| 4.21.8.2.2.1 What is created comes from everyone = richness | 1 |
| 4.21.8.3 Without blending, changing or losing the personal identity | 18 |
| 4.21.9 Sharing different cultures | 9 |
| 4.21.10 Sharing as enrichment | 5 |
| 4.22 Opening up: giving to the other (from me to the other) | 18 |
| 4.22.1 Participate to the culture of the other | 3 |
| 4.22.2 Giving: sharing own belongings | 4 |
| 4.22.2.1 Communicate your identity | 1 |
| 4.22.2.2 Enrich others by sharing | 2 |
| 4.22.3 Necessity to avoid closure | 3 |
| 4.22.3.1 Closure = problem for the encounter | 3 |
| 4.23 Opening up: receiving and welcoming the other (from the other towards me) | 9 |
| 4.23.1 Being interested in the other | 1 |
| 4.23.2 Listening the other | 3 |
| 4.23.3 Adapting to the other | 2 |
| 4.23.4 Taking the good things of the other | 2 |
| 4.23.5 Better understanding the reality of the world | 1 |
| 4.23.6 Perfecting and enriching oneself with other cultures | 8 |
| 4.23.6.1 Getting rich without losing your identity | 3 |
| 4.23.6.2 Learning to know yourself | 1 |
| 4.23.6.3 Learning to value one's own culture more | 2 |
| 4.23.6.4 Every culture is not perfect | 3 |
| 4.23.7 Allow yourself to be contaminated | 1 |
| 4.23.8 Understanding the other | 5 |
| 4.23.9 Welcoming with respect | 7 |
| 4.23.10 Accepting others and diversity | 6 |
| 4.23.10.1 Valuing other cultures | 1 |
| 4.23.10.2 Accepting what is different even if it is difficult | 1 |
| 4.23.10.3 Welcoming diversity (and the other) = richness | 5 |
| 4.23.11 Learning from the other | 4 |
| 4.23.12 Without judging, criticizing | 3 |
| 4.24 Intentionality, Decision, Agreement | 20 |
| 4.24.1 Will, Wish | 1 |
| 4.24.2 Without being forced | 1 |

| | |
|---|----------|
| 4.24.3 Desire to order | 1 |
| 4.24.4 It is not automatic | 1 |
| 4.24.5 Challenge | 2 |
| 4.24.6 Method for interaction | 1 |
| 4.24.7 Commitment, Effort | 8 |
| 4.25 Finding commonalities, a common purpose | 14 |
| 5. MULTICULTURALITY | 0 |
| 5.1 It has boundaries | 1 |
| 5.2 Encountering by necessity | 1 |
| 5.3 It has always been there | 1 |
| 5.4 Socio-cultural condition, geopolitics | 2 |
| 5.5 Gift of God | 1 |
| 5.6 Recognition of scattered cultures | 1 |
| 5.7 Defined, static context | 6 |
| 5.7.1 Matter of fact | 12 |
| 5.8 Contemporary context | 2 |
| 5.9 PROBLEM | 0 |
| 5.9.1 Absence of serenity | 2 |
| 5.9.2 Risk of flattening and conformation to the dominant culture | 1 |
| 5.9.3 Lack of tools to make contact | 1 |
| 5.9.4 Habits Cultural characteristics | 1 |
| 5.9.5 Separation | 1 |
| 5.9.6 Living in a multicultural context without opening up | 2 |
| 5.9.7 Institutional framework | 1 |
| 5.9.8 Risk of relativism and impossibility of union | 1 |
| 5.9.9 Difficulty in bringing together people with different values | 1 |
| 5.9.10 Different legality | 1 |
| 5.9.11 Difficulty of entering other cultures because they are complete | 1 |
| 5.9.12 Stiffness | 1 |
| 5.10 Cultural identity of each one | 7 |
| 5.10.1 Identification | 1 |
| 5.10.2 Has a limit = You have to measure yourself against the society in which you live | 1 |
| 5.10.3 Being complete in one's culture | 1 |
| 5.11 IMAGE | 0 |
| 5.11.1 Forest | 1 |
| 5.11.2 Water and Oil | 1 |
| 5.11.3 Border | 1 |
| 5.11.4 Italy | 1 |
| 5.11.5 Mosaic | 1 |
| 5.11.6 Parallel figures | 1 |
| 5.11.7 Hidden treasure | 1 |
| 5.11.8 Brazil | 1 |
| 5.11.9 Numbers | 1 |
| 5.11.10 Pile, set of bricks | 1 |
| 5.11.11 Subway | 1 |
| 5.11.12 Set of islands | 3 |
| 5.11.13 Photograph of a state of affairs | 1 |
| 5.11.14 Tribe | 1 |
| 5.11.15 City | 1 |
| 5.11.16 Person | 1 |

| | |
|--|----------|
| 5.11.17 Many faces with their own face and identity | 1 |
| 5.11.18 Family | 1 |
| 5.11.19 Garden with flowers | 1 |
| 5.11.20 Tree with branches | 1 |
| 5.11.21 Society that embraces all cultures | 1 |
| 5.12 Presence of different cultures | 21 |
| 5.12.1 In harmony | 1 |
| 5.12.2 In a certain space, time, context | 5 |
| 5.12.3 For working reasons | 1 |
| 5.12.4 Who have things in common | 2 |
| 5.12.5 Which you must welcome to avoid conflict | 1 |
| 5.12.6 Without changing | 3 |
| 5.12.7 Richness of many different cultures | 5 |
| 5.12.8 Living together, cohabiting | 22 |
| 5.12.8.1 Without necessarily having borders | 1 |
| 5.12.8.2 Having a relationship | 0 |
| 5.12.8.3 Together but knowing only those who come from the same culture | 2 |
| 5.12.8.4 Together without encountering or relating | 37 |
| 5.12.8.4.1 Indifference | 0 |
| 5.12.8.4.2 In the group or even in the individual | 1 |
| 5.12.8.4.3 Living together, but each closed in their own culture | 4 |
| 5.12.8.4.4 Richness of many cultures, but without the encounter | 15 |
| 5.12.8.4.4.1 without being able to accommodate the richness of the other | 1 |
| 5.13 EXAMPLES | 2 |
| 5.13.1 University – education institutions | 1 |
| 5.14 Starting point | 10 |
| 5.15 Plurality, diversity, particularity | 38 |
| 5.15.1 Different ways of living | 3 |
| 5.15.2 From different countries or cities | 3 |
| 5.15.3 Different values | 2 |
| 5.15.3.1 Which are shared | 1 |
| 5.15.3.2 Which must be regulated, homologated | 4 |
| 5.15.4 Different ways of reading reality | 2 |
| 5.16 Richness, Opportunity | 5 |
| 5.16.1 Accepting others to live together | 1 |
| 5.17 Respect for every culture | 4 |
| 6. PROBLEM | 0 |
| 6.1 Need to have an open mind | 1 |
| 6.2 Poor collaboration in the modern context | 1 |
| 6.3 Difficulty of entering other cultures because they are complete | 1 |
| 6.4 Multiculturality: Rigidity | 1 |
| 6.5 relate only to those who are part of the same culture | 1 |
| 6.6 Linguistic difficulties | 1 |
| 6.7 Poor awareness of the difference | 1 |
| 6.8 Fear of the other | 3 |
| 6.9 Closure isolation ghettoization | 4 |
| 6.10 Feeling different or stranger | 1 |
| 6.11 Denial non-recognition of diversity | 1 |
| 6.12 Uniformity | 5 |

| | |
|--|----------|
| 7. OPPORTUNITIES | 1 |
| 7.1 Become more yourself | 1 |
| 7.2 More awareness of one's own culture | 1 |
| 7.3 Better knowledge | 1 |
| 7.4 Improvement as a person | 1 |
| 8. Culture – Cultural identity | 2 |
| 8.1 Starting point | 1 |
| 8.2 Name of Action | 1 |
| 8.3 Form of a people | 1 |
| 8.4 Baggage that we take with us | 1 |
| 8.5 Culture is experience | 1 |
| 8.6 Relating and enriching oneself without losing one's identity | 1 |
| 8.7 Plurality within cultures | 1 |
| 8.8 Knowledge of one's own culture | 4 |
| 8.9 Culture is 'mixed' | 1 |
| 9. Other related terms | 0 |
| 9.1 Inculturation | 2 |

Tab. A2 – Comparison among focus groups with respect to variable “Gender”

| | GENDER = F | GENDER = M | GENDER = MF | TOTAL |
|--|------------|------------|-------------|-------|
| INTERCULTURALITY | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| Search for ideals | 0 | 0 | 9.1% | 4.2% |
| Adaptation | 0 | 0 | 9.1% | 4.2% |
| Living together | 0 | 14.3% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Modern phenomenon | 0 | 14.3% | 0 | 4.2% |
| More awareness of oneself and one's personal culture | 0 | 0 | 18.2% | 8.3% |
| Exposure without protection, refuge | 0 | 0 | 9.1% | 4.2% |
| Process | 16.7% | 14.3% | 18.2% | 16.7% |
| Growth | 16.7% | 0 | 9.1% | 8.3% |
| Complementarity | 0 | 0 | 9.1% | 4.2% |
| Trasversalità | 0 | 0 | 9.1% | 4.2% |
| Deeper aspect of plurality | 0 | 14.3% | 9.1% | 8.3% |
| Means to enter the culture of the other | 0 | 14.3% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Interculturality of persons and non-cultures | 0 | 14.3% | 9.1% | 8.3% |
| Plurality, diversity | 0 | 14.3% | 36.4% | 20.8% |
| Respect, recognition of each culture | 0 | 28.6% | 9.1% | 12.5% |
| Without imposing on others | 0 | 0 | 9.1% | 4.2% |
| Without being superior | 16.7% | 14.3% | 18.2% | 16.7% |
| Transformation, Change | 16.7% | 28.6% | 18.2% | 20.8% |
| Improvement, enrichment | 50.0% | 0 | 27.3% | 25.0% |
| Joy to share | 16.7% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Point of arrival | 16.7% | 14.3% | 9.1% | 12.5% |
| Union and mutual sharing | 50.0% | 42.9% | 9.1% | 29.2% |
| Comparison | 0 | 14.3% | 9.1% | 8.3% |
| Entering the dialogue, communication, relation | 66.7% | 100.0% | 72.7% | 79.2% |
| As enrichment | 33.3% | 0 | 36.4% | 25.0% |
| Extend and transmit what you learn from others | 16.7% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| In harmony | 0 | 14.3% | 9.1% | 8.3% |
| Inclusion, relationship and non-separation | 16.7% | 14.3% | 9.1% | 12.5% |

| | | | | |
|---|----------|----------|--------|----------|
| Walking, grow up together | 0 | 28.6% | 18.2% | 16.7% |
| Doing work together | 0 | 0 | 18.2% | 8.3% |
| Encounter, Communion, Exchange and Contamination | 100.0% | 100.0% | 81.8% | 91.7% |
| Becoming one – cancellation of differences | 33.3% | 28.6% | 9.1% | 20.8% |
| Synthesis | 0 | 14.3% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Creating new things | 33.3% | 14.3% | 0 | 12.5% |
| Creating a new reality, culture | 0 | 14.3% | 18.2% | 12.5% |
| Creating and knowing something greater | 33.3% | 0 | 18.2% | 16.7% |
| What is created comes from everyone = richness | 16.7% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Without blending, changing or losing the personal identity | 50.0% | 42.9% | 72.7% | 58.3% |
| Sharing different cultures | 50.0% | 42.9% | 0 | 25.0% |
| Sharing as enrichment | 33.3% | 14.3% | 18.2% | 20.8% |
| Opening up: giving to the other (from me to the other) | 33.3% | 14.3% | 9.1% | 16.7% |
| Participate to the culture of the other | 33.3% | 14.3% | 0 | 12.5% |
| Giving: sharing own belongings | 33.3% | 14.3% | 0 | 12.5% |
| Communicate your identity | 0 | 0 | 9.1% | 4.2% |
| Enrich others by sharing | 16.7% | 14.3% | 0 | 8.3% |
| Necessity to avoid closure | 16.7% | 14.3% | 0 | 8.3% |
| Closure = problem for the encounter | 16.7% | 14.3% | 9.1% | 12.5% |
| Opening up: receiving and welcoming the other (from the other t | 33.3% | 28.6% | 18.2% | 25.0% |
| Being interested in the other | 0 | 0 | 9.1% | 4.2% |
| Listening the other | 0 | 28.6% | 9.1% | 12.5% |
| Adapting to the other | 0 | 28.6% | 0 | 8.3% |
| Taking the good things of the other | 16.7% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Better understanding the reality of the world | 16.7% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Perfecting and enriching oneself with other cultures | 50.0% | 14.3% | 9.1% | 20.8% |
| Getting rich without losing your identity | 33.3% | 14.3% | 0 | 12.5% |
| Learning to know yourself | 16.7% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Learning to value one's own culture more | 16.7% | 0 | 9.1% | 8.3% |
| Every culture is not perfect | 33.3% | 0 | 0 | 8.3% |
| Allow yourself to be contaminated | 16.7% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Understanding the other | 33.3% | 14.3% | 9.1% | 16.7% |
| Welcoming with respect | 50.0% | 28.6% | 18.2% | 29.2% |
| Accepting others and diversity | 33.3% | 0 | 9.1% | 12.5% |
| Valuing other cultures | 16.7% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Accepting what is different even if it is difficult | 0 | 14.3% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Welcoming diversity (and the other) = richness | 16.7% | 14.3% | 27.3% | 20.8% |
| Learning from the other | 50.0% | 0 | 0 | 12.5% |
| Without judging, criticizing | 33.3% | 0 | 9.1% | 12.5% |
| Intentionality, Decision, Agreement | 33.3% | 42.9% | 36.4% | 37.5% |
| Willingness, Wish | 0 | 14.3% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Without being forced | 0 | 14.3% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Desire to order | 0 | 14.3% | 0 | 4.2% |
| It is not automatic | 0 | 0 | 9.1% | 4.2% |
| Challenge | 0 | 0 | 9.1% | 4.2% |
| Method for interaction | 0 | 14.3% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Commitment, Effort | 33.3% | 28.6% | 27.3% | 29.2% |
| Finding commonalities, a common purpose | 33.3% | 85.7% | 27.3% | 45.8% |
| TOTAL | 1,400.00 | 1,157.14 | 900.00 | 1,100.00 |
| N = Documents/Participant | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 |

Tab. A3 – Comparison among focus groups with respect to variable type of community

| | TYPE OF COMM. = TEACHERS | TYPE OF COMM. = STUDENTS | TYPE OF COMM. CONS. LIFE | TOTAL |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| INTERCULTURALITY | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| Search for ideals | 14.3% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Adaptation | 14.3% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Living together | 0 | 0 | 12.5% | 4.2% |
| Modern phenomenon | 0 | 0 | 12.5% | 4.2% |
| More awareness of oneself and one's personal culture | 28.6% | 0 | 0 | 8.3% |
| Exposure without protection, refuge | 14.3% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Process | 42.9% | 0 | 12.5% | 16.7% |
| Growth | 28.6% | 0 | 0 | 8.3% |
| Complementarity | 0 | 11.1% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Trasversalità | 0 | 11.1% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Deeper aspect of plurality | 0 | 11.1% | 12.5% | 8.3% |
| Means to enter the culture of the other | 0 | 11.1% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Interculturality of persons and non-cultures | 28.6% | 0 | 0 | 8.3% |
| Plurality, diversity | 42.9% | 11.1% | 12.5% | 20.8% |
| Respect, recognition of each culture | 0 | 22.2% | 12.5% | 12.5% |
| Without imposing on others | 0 | 11.1% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Without being superior | 0 | 11.1% | 37.5% | 16.7% |
| Transformation, Change | 42.9% | 22.2% | 0 | 20.8% |
| Improvement, enrichment | 28.6% | 33.3% | 12.5% | 25.0% |
| Joy to share | 0 | 11.1% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Point of arrival | 28.6% | 0 | 12.5% | 12.5% |
| Union and mutual sharing | 14.3% | 11.1% | 62.5% | 29.2% |
| Comparison | 14.3% | 0 | 12.5% | 8.3% |
| Entering the dialogue, communication, relation | 85.7% | 66.7% | 87.5% | 79.2% |
| As enrichment | 42.9% | 22.2% | 12.5% | 25.0% |
| Extend and transmit what you learn from others | 0 | 0 | 12.5% | 4.2% |
| In harmony | 0 | 11.1% | 12.5% | 8.3% |
| Inclusion, relationship and non-separation | 14.3% | 11.1% | 12.5% | 12.5% |
| Walking, grow up together | 42.9% | 0 | 12.5% | 16.7% |
| Doing work together | 14.3% | 11.1% | 0 | 8.3% |
| Encounter, Communion, Exchange and Contamination | 71.4% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 91.7% |
| Becoming one – cancellation of differences | 14.3% | 11.1% | 37.5% | 20.8% |
| Synthesis | 14.3% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Creating new things | 14.3% | 0 | 25.0% | 12.5% |
| Creating a new reality, culture | 28.6% | 0 | 12.5% | 12.5% |
| Creating and knowing something greater | 28.6% | 22.2% | 0 | 16.7% |
| What is created comes from everyone = richness | 0 | 11.1% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Without blending, changing or losing the personal identity | 57.1% | 77.8% | 37.5% | 58.3% |
| Sharing different cultures | 14.3% | 22.2% | 37.5% | 25.0% |
| Sharing as enrichment | 42.9% | 0 | 25.0% | 20.8% |
| Opening up: giving to the other (from me to the other) | 0 | 11.1% | 37.5% | 16.7% |
| Participate to the culture of the other | 0 | 0 | 37.5% | 12.5% |
| Giving: sharing own belongings | 0 | 11.1% | 25.0% | 12.5% |
| Communicate your identity | 14.3% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Enrich others by sharing | 14.3% | 0 | 12.5% | 8.3% |
| Necessity to avoid closure | 0 | 0 | 25.0% | 8.3% |

| | | | | |
|---|----------|--------|----------|----------|
| Closure = problem for the encounter | 0 | 11.1% | 25.0% | 12.5% |
| Opening up: receiving and welcoming the other (from the other t | 14.3% | 33.3% | 25.0% | 25.0% |
| Being interested in the other | 0 | 0 | 12.5% | 4.2% |
| Listening the other | 14.3% | 11.1% | 12.5% | 12.5% |
| Adapting to the other | 0 | 11.1% | 12.5% | 8.3% |
| Taking the good things of the other | 0 | 11.1% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Better understanding the reality of the world | 0 | 11.1% | 0 | 4.2% |
| Perfecting and enriching oneself with other cultures | 14.3% | 33.3% | 12.5% | 20.8% |
| Getting rich without losing your identity | 0 | 22.2% | 12.5% | 12.5% |
| Learning to know yourself | 0 | 0 | 12.5% | 4.2% |
| Learning to value one's own culture more | 0 | 11.1% | 12.5% | 8.3% |
| Every culture is not perfect | 0 | 11.1% | 12.5% | 8.3% |
| Allow yourself to be contaminated | 0 | 0 | 12.5% | 4.2% |
| Understanding the other | 0 | 22.2% | 25.0% | 16.7% |
| Welcoming with respect | 42.9% | 11.1% | 37.5% | 29.2% |
| Accepting others and diversity | 0 | 11.1% | 25.0% | 12.5% |
| Valuing other cultures | 0 | 0 | 12.5% | 4.2% |
| Accepting what is different even if it is difficult | 0 | 0 | 12.5% | 4.2% |
| Welcoming diversity (and the other) = richness | 28.6% | 11.1% | 25.0% | 20.8% |
| Learning from the other | 0 | 11.1% | 25.0% | 12.5% |
| Without judging, criticizing | 0 | 11.1% | 25.0% | 12.5% |
| Intentionality, Decision, Agreement | 85.7% | 11.1% | 25.0% | 37.5% |
| Willingness, Wish | 0 | 0 | 12.5% | 4.2% |
| Without being forced | 0 | 0 | 12.5% | 4.2% |
| Desire to order | 0 | 0 | 12.5% | 4.2% |
| It is not automatic | 14.3% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Challenge | 14.3% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Method for interaction | 14.3% | 0 | 0 | 4.2% |
| Commitment, Effort | 57.1% | 11.1% | 25.0% | 29.2% |
| Finding commonalities, a common purpose | 71.4% | 33.3% | 37.5% | 45.8% |
| TOTAL | 1,228.57 | 866.67 | 1,250.00 | 1,100.00 |
| N = Documents/Participant | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 | 100.00 |



Endnotes

1. Cf. E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI, *Interculturality in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities: An Action-Research-Training Project in Italy*, in ID. (eds.), *Education in Multicultural Education to Interculturality: In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy*, Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2023, 33-68.
2. Cf. note 1 in E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI, *Education in Multicultural Education to Interculturality*, in ID. (eds.), *Education*, 19.
3. Cf. OTTONE – PANDOLFI, *Interculturality*, in ID. (eds.), *Education*, 40-45.
4. Cf. *ibid.*, 52-62.
5. Cf. *ibid.*, 57-61.
6. Cf. *The Three Focus Groups*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 356-363.
7. Cf. F. DERIU, *Intercultural Competences in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities: Key Concepts Identified by the Text Analyses of Focus Groups*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 70-112.
8. Cf. *ivi*.
9. Cf. D.L. MORGAN, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. Vol. 16, Sage publications, London 1996.
10. Cf. J. KITZINGER, *Qualitative Research. Introducing Focus Groups*, "British Medical Journal" 311 (1995) 7000, 299-302.
11. Cf. M.L. DE NATALE, *Pedagogia e giustizia*, EDUCatt-Università Cattolica, Milano 2014.
12. Cf. OTTONE – PANDOLFI, *Interculturality*, 45-52.
13. Number of groups that participated to at least one of the scheduled meetings or focus groups.
14. Cf. DERIU, *Intercultural*.
15. Cf. M.J. RAICH, *Hybrid Analysis of Textual Data: Grounding Managerial Decisions on Intertwined Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis*, "Management Decision" 52 (2014) 4, 737-754.
16. Cf. DERIU, *Intercultural*, 70-112.
17. MAXQDA 2020, VERBI Software, Berlin 2019. Available from www.maxqda.com.
18. Cf. U. KUCKARTZ, *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods, Practice and Using Software*, SAGE, Los Angeles, CA 2014; M. SCHREIER, *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA 2012.
19. Cf. U. KUCKARTZ, *Qualitative text analysis: A Systematic Approach. Compendium for Early Career Researchers in Mathematics Education*, Springer, Cham 2019.
20. Cf. B. BERELSON, *Content Analysis in Communication Research*, Free Press, Glencoe, IL 1952, 147.
21. Cf. KUCKARTZ, *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide*.
22. Cf. J. SALDANA, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA 2015.
23. The block distance is a distance measure which is used in statistics to compare two or more statistical units with respect to certain characteristics of interest, in our case the codes. It accounts for the frequency of each code of the codebook for each focus group separately. For further details, Cf. S. ZANI – A. CERIOLI, *Analisi dei dati e data mining per le decisioni aziendali*, Giuffrè editore, Milano 2007.

24. Cf. OTTONE – PANDOLFI, *Interculturality* 39.
25. It should be noted that in MAXQDA's maps the values specifying the frequency of each code can change when subcodes are revealed as well. To illustrate, in Fig. 17 the code "plurality, diversity, particularity" has 53 coded segments, while in Fig. 18 it has 38 coded segments; the difference is simply contained in the sub-codes referred to the code "plurality, diversity, particularity", which accounts for overall 15 coded segments.
26. Cf. OTTONE – PANDOLFI, *Interculturality*, 39-40.
27. *Ivi*.



The Intercultural Challenge in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities

Results of the Quantitative Survey*

❖ Luca Di Censi



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Abstract

This contribution aims to reconstruct the theoretical premises and the methodology adopted for the realization of the quantitative research part, conducted by means of a structured questionnaire, which concluded the *Action-Research-Training* project of this extensive report. The contribution focuses on the preparation of the quantitative instrument for data collection, without reconstructing the general theoretical-conceptual framework. It then reports the results of the survey conducted in education contexts, providing the reader with useful insights into the problems and opportunities that can arise from living in a multicultural context, as well as some contextual elements within education areas that are necessary for understanding the learning processes in contexts of linguistic and cultural plurality.

Keywords

Structured questionnaire – Multiculturality – Education contexts – Interculturality – Intercultural competences

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* Translated from the original
Italian by Nina Deliu

Rather than knowledge of others, what determines the success of intercultural dialogue is the basic ability to listen, cognitive flexibility, empathy, humility, and hospitality¹.

1

Premise

This contribution aims to reconstruct the theoretical premises and the methodology adopted for the realization of the quantitative part of the survey, by means of a structured questionnaire. It also concludes the *Action-Research-Training* project entitled *Multiculturality and intercultural competences in ecclesiastical institution of higher education and in formation communities of consecrated life*. Before illustrating the study design, we reconstruct the general theoretical-conceptual framework that guided the research team into the formulation and conceptualization of the research problem, as well as the preparation of the instruments for data collection. The realized research is doubly placed, particularly from the point of view of the different contexts: on one side, universities or Pontifical faculties and ecclesial academic institutions, on the other side, formation communities of consecrated life, both characterized by a certain multiculturalism with respect to both educators and students.

2

A multilevel and integrated approach for the study of the education of intercultural competences in multicultural contexts

The requirement of statistical representativity, or, in other words, the generalizability of the results to the population as a whole, is not always needed in surveys, and sometimes this constraint may actually be an obstacle to producing theoretically relevant results. Although minoritarian, based on this thesis, which recalls the one well-expressed by Johan Galtung: «the choice of the sample has to be made on the basis of the research purpose, a prescription which becomes less trivial in the light of the number of cases where standard recipes are followed just because they exist and are simple to follow»², we made the choice of a multistage sampling strategy according to our research objectives.

As mentioned in the introductory contribution of this research³, the employed sampling strategy is a multistage sampling according to which:

- in the *first stage*, three geographical areas are selected and divided into North, Center, and South of Italy;
- in the *second stage*, within each of the selected first-stage areas, a number of academic communities and a number of communities of consecrated or apostolic life, for which we tried to achieve a balanced sample across male and female communities, were sampled. A particular over-representation interested the Roman area, where we have the highest concentration of ecclesiastical academic institutions and formation communities of multicultural Institutes of Consecrated Life;
- in the *third stage*, we sampled all the students, namely all the consecrated men and women, the priests, and the lay people belonging to the ecclesiastical academic institutions and to the formation communities of Institutes of Consecrated Life, sampled in the previous stage (excluding teachers and formators). Overall, we reached 10 university Institutions (including the 6 selected for the qualitative research part), and 19 formation communities (including the 7 selected for the qualitative research part). From the Questionnaire survey, we also came across other Pontifical universities in Rome that were not contacted by the research team, but which were visited by consecrated men and women from the reached formation communities of consecrated life, which filled-in the Questionnaire.

At each stage, we proceeded with a selection of the (aggregated) units based on criteria that from time to time resulted to be the most adequate and feasible (purposive sampling).

The adopted form of sampling responds to the need for typological representativeness, considerate of its objective (i.e., assessing the relationships between variables), and allows to compare groups (i.e., social types) of equivalent sample sizes. These are identified through a combined reference to variables considered important, and independently on their numerical representativeness within the general population.

The approach of this work is guided by the *Action-Research* methodology and by participative and educative dynamics with the aim of identifying, analyzing, and improving a certain situation *in a participative way*. It is assumed that this occurs with the engagement of all participants, both researchers and individual subjects, both universities and communities. The dynamics of the research and the *auto-analysis in view of change* are combined and merged in a conscious and supervised way by activating knowledge, competences, evaluations, decisions, and actions. In this way, it triggers a process of development and widespread growth of knowledge and competences (within the scientific and academic communities as well as communities of consecrated or apostolic life) and specific *empowerment* for future actions⁴. The same dynamics, experienced within contexts of cultural pluralities, are enriched by processes, elements, and challenges increasingly common in contemporary societies⁵.

The quantitative research work was placed within an integrated perspective and was moved by the qualitative research phase and its instruments (working grids of the focus groups and question lists of the interviews). According to a *Mixed Methods Research* framework, from the analysis of the information that emerged during the focus groups interviews (analyzed with textual analysis software), a structured questionnaire was developed and translated into 9 languages (Arabic, Chinese, Korean, French, English, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Vietnamese).

The choice of integrating the two approaches⁶, rather than treating them as two distinct alternatives, allows to overcome the limitations of each of the two methodologies and to combine their individual strengths, enabling a deeper and increasingly multifaced understanding of the phenomenon under study. The mixed method is particularly useful in the case of complex research questions (as in our case) and strengthens the validity of the obtained results. The adoption of a mixed method enabled a joint qualitative and quantitative analysis of the dimension of intercultural competences in the observed contexts, and the possibility to comprehend their peculiarities. Specifically, the qualitative method was adopted to understand the different interpretations of the two concepts of multiculturalism and interculturality and to define the intercultural competences required for living in intercultural contexts⁷. Furthermore, this qualitative phase allowed us to collect essential elements for the construction of the questionnaire and to better guide the research hypotheses.

As anticipated, during this phase, the number of involved ecclesiastical academic institutions and formation communities of consecrated life was further expanded. The qualitative phase, conducted between September 2018 and January 2020, has contributed to the development of an empirical basis, which introduced additional factors neglected during the problem conceptualization phases; nevertheless, it provided the contents and the structural elements for the realization of the questionnaire, designed between June 2019 and December 2019.

The questionnaire was then subject to a hardworking testing phase, aimed to control potential bias sources related to the formulation of the questions (complexity or unclearness of the question, underdetermination, overdetermination, obtrusiveness) as well as other complex factors due to its translations in 9 languages.

During this phase, twenty *pretesting* interviews were conducted *face-to-face* and additional thirty interviews were administered online. This canonical *pretesting* was also augmented with an *expert review pretesting*. The accurate *pre-test* allowed us to

take action in the wording, the order of the questions, their number, a more adequate formulation of the response types, and the closure of certain questions. Only after this phase, the final version of the questionnaire – consisting of 62 questions⁸ – was drawn up, and the survey was implemented online on the *LimeSurvey* platform. Although an online questionnaire may pose problems of statistical representativeness of the population of reference, it also presents several positive aspects related to the faithfulness and the quality of the collected data⁹. The survey was conducted between March 2021 and June 2021 and collected 535 questionnaires (among which 401 provided answers to the section dedicated to formation communities of consecrated life and 469 dedicated to universities).

3

The research instruments

The multilevel conceptualization, which guided the selection of the relevant hypotheses' properties, based on which the empirical data collection was carried out, is summarized in Tab. 1. It emphasizes how this survey explored several theoretically influent factors of various nature that, despite belonging to different levels of analysis, recall the social process of production of the concept of multiculturalism and intercultural competences.

Tab. 1 – Conceptualization system of the dimensions of analysis with the corresponding utilized instruments

| Dimensions explored by the instruments | Questionnaire Items | Focus Groups Questions | Other Instruments* |
|---|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Socio-demographical characteristics</i> | | | |
| Age, gender, life status, education level | 1,2,3,4 | | |
| Country of birth, living condition | 5,12,13 | | |
| University attended | 14,15,16 | | |
| <i>Biographical aspects</i> | | | |
| Permanence in Italy or abroad, migration path | 6,7,8 | | |
| Opportunities/difficulties of inclusion | 9,10,11 | 1.2, 1.3 | |
| Congregation of origin, experience in multicultural communities | 37,38,39 | | |
| Relations network | 59,60 | | |
| <i>Intercultural dynamics in multicultural communities</i> | | | |
| Opportunities in multiculturalism | 21,43 | 1.2 | |
| Problems in multiculturalism | 22-27,44-50 | 1.3, 3.1 | |
| Relational climate in multicultural contexts | 20,42 | | |
| <i>Internazionalization of formation communities (U e VC)</i> | | | |
| Members internationality | 17,18,40,41 | | |
| Multilingualism (communications, classes, texts) | 19,28,29,45 | 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 | |
| Pluralism of the teaching model | 30,31,32,51,52,53 | 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 | |
| Proposals to promote interaction | | 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 | |
| <i>Multiculturalism towards interculturalism</i> | | | |
| Concept of interculturalism (and difference compared to multiculturalism) | 33,54,58 | 1.1 | |
| Interculturalism experience | 34,55 | 2.1 | |
| Interculturalism in education contexts | 35,36,56,57 | 2.2, 2.3 | |
| <i>Intercultural competences</i> | | | |
| Intercultural competences | 61,62 | 3.2 | * |

* The dimension "Intercultural competences" is also investigated by means of other two qualitative instruments¹⁰.

Having selected delimited collectives has also enabled the adoption of a multi-level and integrated approach for this survey¹¹. During the data processing, this strategy has allowed connecting individual properties with contextual properties, under the perspective of multilevel analysis. Such an approach can be defined as integrated as it combines standardized and non-standardized data-collection techniques in the same research design, with the perspective of *Mixed Methods Research*.

The inclusion of qualitative instruments in this *action-research-training* has the objective of identifying, analyzing, and improving in a participative way a certain experience through the involvement of every single research participant. The dynamics of the research and the *auto-analysis in view of change* are combined and merged in a conscious and supervised way by activating knowledge, competences, evaluations, decisions, and actions. In this way, it triggers a process of development and widespread growth of knowledge and competences as well as precise *empowerment* for future actions.

4

The results of the quantitative survey

In the previous paragraphs, we reported the theoretical-methodological premises which justified and guided this research; in the subsequent paragraphs, we will illustrate the analytical hypotheses that connect the different aspects to the different identified survey areas.

The profile of the survey participants is characterized by a variety of geographical contexts based on their provenience. The most represented area is the Asian one with 32.6% of the respondents, followed by the African region with 27.1% of the individuals; taken together these represent more than half of the respondents.

Tab. 2 – Respondents based on their geographical provenience (continent)

| | Percentage |
|---------------|------------|
| Asia | 32.6% |
| Africa | 27.1% |
| Europe | 21.6% |
| Latin America | 14.6% |
| North America | 1.7% |
| Oceania | 0.4% |

The female component amounts of 71.6% and the prevalent age range is the one between 31 and 40 years old. The male collective is younger than the female collective. Based on the ecclesial status, the component of consecrated men and women is 68.4%

Tab. 3 – Respondents based on their gender

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Male | 152 | 28.4% |
| Female | 383 | 71.6% |
| Total | 535 | 100.0% |

Tab. 4 – Respondents based on their age class

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------|-----------|------------|
| 18-30 | 169 | 31.6% |
| 31-40 | 238 | 44.5% |
| 41-50 | 84 | 15.7% |
| 51-60 | 30 | 5.6% |
| 61 or more | 14 | 2.6% |
| Total | 535 | 100.0% |

Tab. 5 – Respondents based on their ecclesial status

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| A diocesan priest | 27 | 5.0% |
| A seminarian | 45 | 8.4% |
| A consecrated person | 366 | 68.4% |
| A lay person | 97 | 18.1% |
| Total | 535 | 100.0% |

The education level is very high, with 64.5% having an academic degree; only 6.7% have a low education level and 22.5% own an upper secondary (high) school diploma; a residual 6.4% declare to have an education level not listed in the response options of the questionnaire question.

Tab. 6 – Respondents based on their degree

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Primary (Elementary) School Diploma | 6 | 1.1% |
| Lower secondary Education (Middle) School Diploma | 12 | 2.2% |
| Vocational School Diploma | 18 | 3.4% |
| Technical or Commercial School Diploma | 17 | 3.2% |
| Upper Secondary (Senior High) School Diploma | 103 | 19.3% |
| Bachelor's Degree | 218 | 40.7% |
| Master's Degree / Licentiate | 116 | 21.7% |
| PhD / Doctoral Degree | 11 | 2.1% |
| Other | 34 | 6.4% |
| Total | 535 | 100.0% |

As anticipated, most of the respondents come from countries different from Italy, and their path to arrive in this country was a direct route for just over one-half (54.5%) of them, while the remaining ones have previously lived in another (one) country (24.3%) or more than one (21.1%).

Tab. 7 – Respondents based on their path before arriving in Italy

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Yes, has lived in only one country | 107 | 24.3% |
| Yes, has lived in more than one country | 93 | 21.1% |
| No, has arrived directly in Italy | 240 | 54.5% |
| Total | 440 | 100.0% |

The length of stay in Italy is long-term for 14.5% of the individuals, who have stayed in Italy for more than 6 years, while for those who have arrived recently, i.e., less than a year, the percentage is 10.7%; all the remaining ones have stayed in the country between one and five years.

Tab. 8 – Respondents based on their length of stay in Italy

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| Less than a year | 47 | 10.7% |
| 1-2 years | 151 | 34.3% |
| 3-4 years | 122 | 27.7% |
| 5-6 years | 56 | 12.7% |
| More than 6 years | 64 | 14.5% |
| Total | 440 | 100.0% |

The prevailing motivation for moving to Italy is to complete their religious formation (78%).

Tab. 9 – Respondents based on their motivation to arrive in Italy

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| I came to Italy before choosing consecrated life or priestly formation | 10 | 2.5% |
| I chose consecrated life or priestly formation outside Italy, then I was sent to Italy to complete my formation | 312 | 78.0% |
| I moved to my congregation in Italy from another congregation outside of Italy | 11 | 2.8% |
| Other | 67 | 16.8% |
| Total | 400 | 100.0% |

The arrival in Italy was affected, for almost half of the respondents (48.4%), by different problems, first, the difficulty of communication due to a limited understanding of the Italian language, reflected also in the reduced ability to study profitably based on texts in Italian or to attend the classes. On average, respondents have identified around 2.8 difficulties each.

The genesis of these problems is to be traced to the cultural diversities and to the different habits which define everyday life. Among these problems, one respondent out of ten has pointed to discrimination episodes, although most commonly reported by those who have lived in Italy for a long time (see Tab. 12). This could suggest that some prejudices could have been overcome or resized, compared to one decade ago, and that the multicultural component has been somehow established in the Italian context, which, compared to other countries, has become an immigration country only in its recent history.

Tab. 10 – Respondents based on whether they have experienced any difficulty upon their arrival in Italy

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 213 | 48.4% |
| No | 227 | 51.6% |
| Total | 440 | 100.0% |

Tab. 11 – Respondents based on the main difficulties experienced upon their arrival in Italy

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Difficulty in communication due to poor knowledge of the Italian language | 174 | 29.0% |
| Difficulty in studies due to poor knowledge of the Italian language | 118 | 19.7% |
| Difficulty in getting used to different eating habits (food, meal times, etc.) | 100 | 16.7% |
| Difficulties due to cultural differences in the way people relate to each other (closeness, gestures, etc.) | 90 | 15.0% |
| Ethnic bias against me | 33 | 5.5% |
| Racist behavior towards me | 24 | 4.0% |
| Difficulties in getting public assistance (health/social services) | 25 | 4.2% |
| Difficulties in entering the school/university system | 21 | 3.5% |
| Other | 14 | 2.3% |
| Total | 599 | 100.0% |

Tab. 12 – Respondents based on their length of stay and experiences of prejudice or racism

| | How long have you been in Italy? | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|
| | Less than a year | 1-2 years | 3-4 years | 5-6 years | More than 6 years |
| Ethnic bias against me | 7.7% | 10.4% | 14.3% | 11.1% | 38.7% |
| Racist behavior towards me | 0.0% | 9.1% | 8.9% | 13.9% | 22.6% |

While we cannot know exactly where and how these episodes of intolerance have occurred, we can assess their main occurrence based on the attended education context of the respondents. We can notice that, for both items, the percentages are greater for respondents that attend a university context only, while the smallest percentage is registered among respondents that live in communities of consecrated life only.

Tab. 13 – Respondents based on any reported problems of prejudice or racism and education context

| | Racist behavior towards me | Ethnic bias against me |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------|
| | Yes | Yes |
| Attending only universities | 20.0% | 25.7% |
| Attending both universities and communities of consecrated life | 10.5% | 13.1% |
| Attending only communities of consecrated life | 4.0% | 16.0% |

These difficulties have been overcome in most of the cases thanks to the help of the congregation or the education context (70.9%), to the help of friends (43.7%), and, to a reduced extent compared to the former two cases, to the help of compatriots (29.6%).

This result points out to a supportive community, aiming to quickly integrate those members that encounter any difficulties. Only 22.1% of the respondents did not ask for help and overcame their difficulties alone by themselves.

Tab. 14 – Respondents based on the strategy they adopted to overcome the difficulties encountered upon their arrival in Italy

| | Percentage |
|--|------------|
| I was helped by members of my congregation or by the education program | 70.9% |
| I was helped by friends | 43.7% |
| I was helped by people from my own country | 29.6% |
| I overcame the difficulties alone | 22.1% |
| I was helped by government officials | 3.8% |
| Other | 9.4% |

Considering their consecrated status, 85.6% of the consecrated men and women live in communities with other people, while those living with family (10.1%) or alone (1.7%) are exclusively non-consecrated men and women.

4.1 Multiculturality and intercultural competences in university contexts and in formation communities of consecrated life

As previously mentioned, the questionnaire is organized in two sections, one for those attending a university, and another one for those living in a community of consecrated life.

The questionnaire section dedicated to those belonging to universities has collected 469 responses, and the one dedicated to communities to consecrated life 401, with a prevalence of female responses in both cases (70.4% for universities, 79.1% for communities). Overall, 45% of the respondents attend a bachelor's course and 25.8% a master course, while the remaining 29.2% are distributed between doctoral courses and other education paths.

The perception of living in multicultural contexts is strongly felt and in 63% of these cases, most of the people come from countries different from Italy, in both investigated contexts. Such percentage increases to 74.6% for universities and 69.6% for communities respectively if we also include in our statistics the response option "more than one half". The difference between the two collectives is relevant only with respect to those reporting to live in contexts where the multicultural component is a minority: 5.3% vs 17.5% for universities and communities to consecrated life, respectively. This last result is related to those small communities made up of a few individuals of the same nationality.

Respondents that live in communities of consecrated life belong to congregations that were founded in Italy in 68.6% of the cases, the remaining ones are distributed between different geographical macro-areas worldwide; the three macro-areas with the highest percentages are Northern Europe (6.7%), Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan / South Africa.

Tab. 15 – Respondents based on their perception of multiculturality (i.e., the presence of people coming from countries different from their own) in their education context

| | University | Community of consecrated life |
|------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|
| Majority of them | 63.3% | 63.1% |
| More than half of them | 11.3% | 6.5% |
| Half of them | 6.6% | 5.0% |
| Less than half of them | 6.4% | 7.0% |
| A minority | 5.3% | 17.5% |
| I don't know | 7.0% | 1.0% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

The geographical areas of origin of their university colleagues are Asia with a percentage of 44.4%, followed by Africa and Latin America with 25.7% and 10.7%, respectively; the European continent registers 7.7% of cases, and lastly, North America and Oceania amount for a 3% jointly. According to their perception, it is thus evident the wide variety of proveniences. It may be hypothesized that the great heterogeneity of cultures and idioms makes communication difficult and poses a challenge to university education. We can notice how universities respond to this challenge and which actions are implemented to make cultural coexistence an opportunity.

A questionnaire item allows us to find out that university communications are written in multiple languages in 39.2% of the cases, 17.5% in at least another additional language, and 43.3% exclusively in Italian. Despite being auto-reported information, such a percentage is quite high, especially if one considers the strong multiculturalism within these institutions.

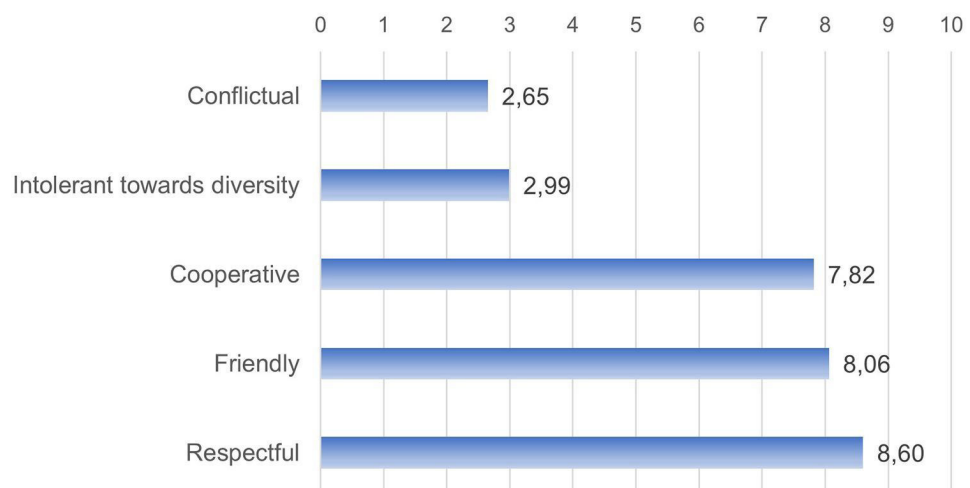
Tab. 16 – Respondents based on their length of stay in Italy

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Yes, in at least two languages | 184 | 39.2% |
| Yes, in more than two languages | 82 | 17.5% |
| No, only in Italian | 203 | 43.3% |
| Total | 469 | 100.0% |

The atmosphere within universities is generally respectful of diversity, friendly and cooperative, although the “negative” questionnaire items report not extremely low values.

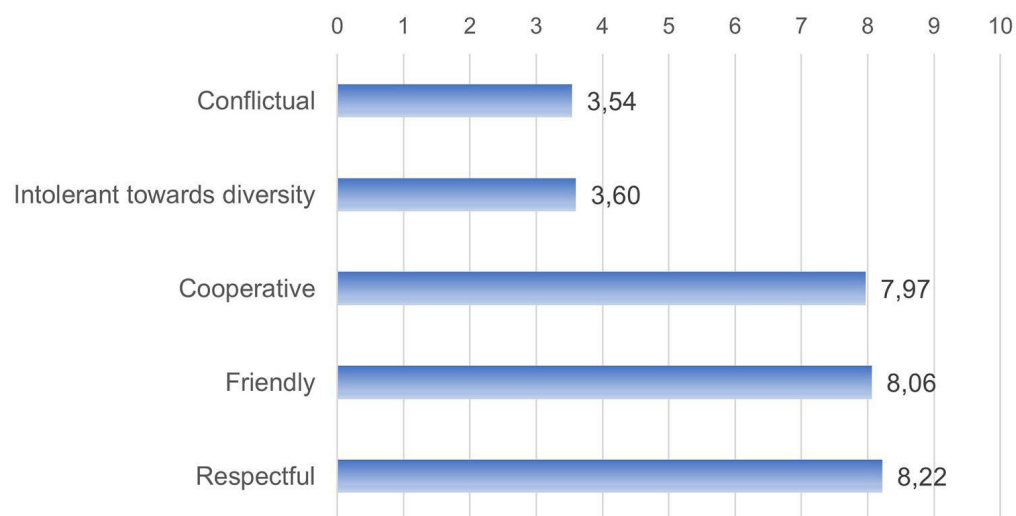
Differently from the university context, in communities of consecrated life, the Italian component has a higher impact, despite being strongly multicultural.

Graph. 1 – Relational climate between people of different nationality in universities



Compared to the other geographical macro-areas, the Asian community is the one with the highest values in the negative dimensions related to the relationships between people of different nationalities, in universities. It may be hypothesized that this geographical macro-area is culturally distant from the other cultures in the academic context.

Graph. 2 – Relational climate between people of different nationality in communities of consecrated life



With similar scores, in communities of consecrated life, the perceived atmosphere is respectful, friendly, and cooperative, although the negative questionnaire items are slightly higher compared to those registered in the academic context. This can suggest that the co-living situation is more often characterized by conflictual episodes due to different cultural belonging and because people share spaces for longer terms compared to the academic context.

The questionnaire has also assessed the extent to which a multicultural context represents an opportunity; the items that registered the highest frequency are pertinent to cognitive dimensions such as the “possibility” of knowing other cultures (20.8% for universities; 20.6% for communities) and of opening-up the horizons on the understanding of the world.

Other responses that question personal identity or represent a point of reflection on its limits are reported by around half of the respondents. Based on gender, male respondents are more likely to choose a response modality that involves a cultural transformation.

Tab. 17 – Opportunities offered by a multicultural context according to the educational institution

| Opportunities that a multicultural context offers (percentage) | University | Community of consecrated life |
|---|------------|-------------------------------|
| It gives the chance to get to know other cultures | 20.80% | 20.60% |
| It opens up one’s horizons on understanding the world | 19.90% | 18.00% |
| It teaches how to live with different people | 18.10% | 20.00% |
| It enables people to transform their cultural approach, by enriching it | 16.40% | 15.50% |
| It helps people to understand the limits of their own cultural approach | 13.40% | 13.40% |
| It promotes the learning of new languages | 9.70% | 10.10% |
| Other | 1.80% | 2.40% |
| Total | 100.00% | 100.00% |

The identified problems of living in a multicultural context are the linguistic differences, which do not allow a deep comprehension between individuals, and the difficulties to adapt to diversities. Furthermore, it is noticed the tendency to create groups

of the same nationality that do not relate to the context. Albeit to a small extent, there are people identifying the risk of personal identity transformation as a problem. The multicultural coexistence needs an effort to adapt to cultural and linguistic diversities, which in turn often leads to an intolerance generated by different ways of living everyday life, mostly highlighted in community contexts.

Tab. 18 – Problems caused by living in a multicultural context according to the education context

| Problems deriving from living in a multicultural context | University | Community of consecrated life |
|---|------------|-------------------------------|
| The different languages do not facilitate deep communication | 28.8% | 21.0% |
| It requires effort to adapt to differences | 26.3% | 28.5% |
| Closed groups are formed by people of the same nationality | 16.7% | 12.3% |
| It leads to some confusion in the learning activity | 8.5% | 8.5% |
| The different ways of doing and thinking can make living together uncomfortable | 8.7% | 16.2% |
| Other | 7.2% | 7.6% |
| There is a risk of changing one's cultural identity | 3.9% | 5.8% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

The conflictual components within education contexts were analyzed as well, and it came out that these are not sporadic but quite frequent episodes, especially within communities of consecrated life. Overall, 21.5% of university respondents and 43.1% of consecrated men and women have had problems with people of a different nationality. Students that mostly experienced such events come from North Europe, North America, and Asia except North Asia. Considering that 43.1% of the consecrated men and women declared to have had problems with people of a different nationality, the indication of difficulty in managing the coexistence of (different) cultures is evident. Such problems are mainly due to everyday life activities, although 25.8% and 24.9% of the respondents from academic contexts and communities, respectively, report having been victims of ethnic bias and/or having been isolated from relationships (22.6% in universities; 17.6% in communities; see Tab. 20).

These problems were less common among people that transited through other countries before their arrival in Italy. Thus, we could probably attribute the origin of such problems to a real difficulty related to multicultural coexistence and sharing of living spaces and times, where differences become more evident, and everyone searches for their own strategy in order to establish their identity.

Tab. 19 – Respondents that had problems with other people/groups within academic contexts and communities of consecrated life

| | University | Community of consecrated life |
|-------|------------|-------------------------------|
| Yes | 21.5% | 43.1% |
| No | 78.5% | 56.9% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Tab. 20 – Respondents based on the problems they had to face with other people/groups within academic contexts and communities of consecrated life (when they responded Yes to the item reported in Tab. 19)

| | University | Community of consecrated life |
|---|------------|-------------------------------|
| Being excluded from learning activities | 8.1% | 9.4% |
| Ethnic bias against me | 25.8% | 24.9% |
| Being isolated from relationships | 22.6% | 17.6% |
| Episodes of racism | 7.3% | 11.2% |
| Other | 36.3% | 36.9% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

In academic contexts, such episodes typically occurred with another individual person, but 37.6% of cases are attributable to a group of people. On the contrary, within communities, the reported problems are equally distributed between individuals and groups of people, suggesting that the dynamics of exclusion are shared across multiple people.

Tab. 21 – Occurrence of the problem with an individual person or with a group of people based on the education context

| | University | Community of consecrated life |
|----------------------|------------|-------------------------------|
| An individual person | 62.4% | 49.7% |
| A group of people | 37.6% | 50.3% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Comprehending these behaviors and the dialogue have been the main adopted strategies to face and solve the problems within both collectives; the only alternative response option was to speak to a superior or to a person of reference in the university (see Tab. 22). The latter is partially related to the characteristic of certain communities to respond to a specific hierarchy, and consequently to draw superiors' attention for resolving conflicts in the guise of *super partes*.

Tab. 22 – Respondents based on the adopted strategies to face and the problems with other people or groups

| Problems deriving from living in a multicultural context | University | Community of consecrated life |
|---|------------|-------------------------------|
| I spoke to a person of reference in the university – to my superior | 9.7% | 21.0% |
| I spoke to the person(s) concerned for clarification | 24.7% | 25.2% |
| I tried to understand the reasons for such behavior | 38.3% | 34.2% |
| I ignored the incident | 18.2% | 12.6% |
| Other | 9.1% | 6.9% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

4.2 Cultural model of reference within the analyzed contexts

As anticipated, although the investigated academic contexts are characterized by strong multiculturalism, communications are principally shared in Italian, and in only 13,6% of the cases, these are translated into another language. This suggests a lack of attention toward the multitude of students coming from different parts of the world, who have limited knowledge of the Italian language and who are most likely to have greater difficulties in finding their way in the academic context.

Tab. 23 – In your university curriculum, classes are conducted

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Only in Italian | 402 | 85.7% |
| In Italian and in other languages | 64 | 13.6% |
| Only in another language | 3 | 0.6% |
| Total | 469 | 100.0% |

The cultural matrix is dominated by the presence of European textbooks, and, considering the prevalence of faculties for religious formation, this could very likely create a conflict with the way spirituality has been lived before arriving in Italy.

Tab. 24 – The teachers of the courses/workshops you have attended adopt

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| Only European texts | 122 | 26.0% |
| Mostly European texts with a small portion of texts from other continents | 232 | 49.5% |
| Both texts from Europe and other continents, in equal parts | 106 | 22.6% |
| Mostly texts from other continents with a small portion of European texts | 5 | 1.1% |
| Only texts belonging to a non-European source | 4 | 0.9% |
| Total | 469 | 100.0% |

Such differences in the university curriculum are confirmed by 36.5% of the students that recognize an educational model which is *very* dissimilar to the one experienced in the country of origin; instead, 38.2% of respondents perceive it as *partially* dissimilar, while the remaining 6.6% very similar.

Tab. 25 – In your university curriculum in Italy, did you find any differences with the educational model of your country?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| I have always studied in Italy | 88 | 18.8% |
| Yes, very different | 171 | 36.5% |
| Yes, partly different | 179 | 38.2% |
| No, very similar | 31 | 6.6% |
| Total | 469 | 100.0% |

Although the educational model distinguishes itself by a specific Italian peculiarity, marked by an old academic tradition, almost all the respondents agree that the acquired concepts can be used in their countries of origin.

Tab. 26 – Are the concepts you are learning in your study curriculum useful in your country of origin?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 358 | 94.0% |
| No | 23 | 6.0% |
| Total | 381 | 100.0% |

In addition to the competences, also the educational model is considered to be applicable in the country of origin, either entirely (43.8%) or partly (50.9%). Only 5.2% of the respondents believe that the educational model experienced in Italy cannot be replicated in the country of origin.

Tab. 27 – Is the educational model you are experiencing in Italy (classes, testing methods, and homework) applicable in your country of origin?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|-----------|------------|
| Yes | 167 | 43.8% |
| Yes, only partly | 194 | 50.9% |
| Yes | 20 | 5.2% |
| Total | 381 | 100.0% |

The bivariate (statistical) analysis of the replicability of the educational model in relation to the macro-areas of origin, identifies geographical areas which suggest incompatibility with the Italian model. Overall, 50% of the respondents coming from the Middle East, and 20% of those from North America and East Europe, do not see any possibility of using this educational model. The reasons for the impossibility of replicating it, are to be searched not so much in the geographical distances as in the cultural differences.

Vice versa, within communities of consecrated life, there is great attention to linguistic diversities, and communications are written in two or more languages in half of the cases. This modality is certainly dictated by practical needs to facilitate coexistence.

Tab. 28 – In your community of consecrated life, are communications written in multiple languages?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Yes, in at least two languages | 78 | 19.5% |
| Yes, in more than two languages | 95 | 23.7% |
| No, only in Italian | 228 | 56.9% |
| Total | 401 | 100.0% |

Communications are mostly written in the Italian language within Italian congregations; vice versa, these are written in two or more languages within congregations founded outside Italy (see Tab. 29).

Tab. 29 – Place where the congregation was founded and the number of languages for writing communications

| | In your community of consecrated life, are communications written in multiple languages? | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------|
| | Yes, in at least two languages | Yes, in more than two languages | No, only in Italian | Total |
| Congregation founded in Italy | 51.3% | 66.7% | 75.4% | 68.6% |
| Congregation founded outside Italy | 48.7% | 33.3% | 25.6% | 31.4% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

The organization of community life is mostly inspired by a European matrix, with just 22.2% being able to adopt more than one cultural matrix. Less than 10% adopt cultural matrices different from the European ones.

Tab. 30 – The prevailing model of community life in your community (organization of the community, schedules, food, tasks, use of common spaces, etc.) is:

| | Percentage |
|--|------------|
| Only European | 26.2% |
| Preferably European with a small part from other cultural matrices | 42.6% |
| Plural and sensitive to models of several cultural matrices | 22.2% |
| Preferably from different cultural matrices with a small part of European matrix | 6.2% |
| Only of matrices different from the European one | 2.7% |
| Total | 100.0% |

Within communities to consecrated life in Italy, the educational models are perceived as *very* different and *partly* different compared to those experienced in the country of origin, in 29.2% and 47.4% of cases, respectively. Only a small 12.7% consider it to be very similar.

Tab. 31 – In your religious formation in Italy, did you find differences from the formation model of your home country?

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| I don't know, I was formed in Italy | 43 | 10.7% |
| Yes, very different | 117 | 29.2% |
| Yes, partly different | 190 | 47.4% |
| No, very similar | 51 | 12.7% |
| Total | 401 | 100.0% |

The model of spirituality in communities is principally inspired by a European matrix, despite 26.7% of the respondents giving space and attention to a plurality of models and matrices for living spirituality. A total of 5.2% use models of their home geographical contexts.

Tab. 32 – The prevailing model of spirituality in your community (lifestyle, apostolate, prayer, formation, readings, etc.) is:

| | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| Only European | 100 | 24.9% |
| Preferably European with a small part from other cultural matrices | 173 | 43.1% |
| Plural and sensitive to models of several cultural matrices | 107 | 26.7% |
| Preferably from different cultural matrices with a small part of European matrix | 13 | 3.2% |
| Only of matrices different from the European one | 8 | 2.0% |
| Total | 401 | 100.0% |

Even if congregations that were founded outside Italy, in virtue of their origins, adopt a model different from the Western ones, most of them can be assimilated to a European model.

Tab. 33 – Prevailing model of community life in your community based on the congregation’s origin

| | Only European | Preferably European with a small part from other cultural matrices | Plural and sensitive to models of several cultural matrices | Preferably from different cultural matrices with a small part of European matrix | Only of matrices different from the European one | Total |
|------------------------------------|---------------|--|---|--|--|--------|
| Congregation founded in Italy | 24.7% | 47.3% | 23.6% | 4.0% | 0.4% | 100.0% |
| Congregation founded outside Italy | 29.4% | 32.5% | 19.0% | 11.1% | 7.9% | 100.0% |
| Total | 26.2% | 42.6% | 22.2% | 6.2% | 2.7% | 100.0% |

The analysis of the spirituality model with respect to its foundation origin shares the same situation registered for the educational model; a slight difference is seen in terms of the greater inclination to adopt plural models to live spirituality, especially in the case of congregations founded outside Italy (see Tab. 34).

Tab. 34 – Prevailing model of spirituality life in your community based on the congregation’s origin

| | Only European | Preferably European with a small part from other cultural matrices | Plural and sensitive to models of several cultural matrices | Preferably from different cultural matrices with a small part of European matrix | Only of matrices different from the European one | Total |
|------------------------------------|---------------|--|---|--|--|--------|
| Congregation founded in Italy | 24.7% | 48.7% | 24.7% | 1.1% | 0.7% | 100.0% |
| Congregation founded outside Italy | 25.4% | 31.0% | 31.0% | 7.9% | 4.8% | 100.0% |
| Total | 24.9% | 43.1% | 26.7% | 3.2% | 2.0% | 100.0% |

In summary, the cultural matrix, both in academic environments and formation communities to consecrated life (language, contents, educative methods, organization of the community, schedules, food, tasks, use of common spaces, etc.), is dominated by a European cultural matrix, with a high risk to fall into a monocultural approach. The potential negative consequences of a monocultural perspective may translate into a greater presence of cultural conflicts, learning difficulty and frictions, both at a personal and at a relational level. Furthermore, a monocultural approach is likely to not take into proper account of the “cultural background” of individuals, increasing the chance of misunderstandings.

4.3 Definition of interculturality

Respondents were asked to choose one of the two definitions of interculturality that would reflect their educational/formative context. The first one does not include elements of cultural contamination (A), while the second one involves a transformation process, following an intercultural exchange, which leads to mutual enrichment (B; Tab. 35).

Although with only a slightly increased percentage, compared to members of communities of consecrated life, (university) students opted for the second definition, sharing thus a model which involves contaminations and enrichment during the cultural exchange.

Most of the students and members of communities of consecrated life consider their living contexts as really or sufficiently intercultural, especially among those who chose the first definition of interculturality. In both education contexts, compared to the male gender, females agree mostly with the second definition of interculturality.

Tab. 35 – Respondents based on the definition they give to interculturality

| Problems deriving from living in a multicultural context | University | Community of consecrated life |
|---|------------|-------------------------------|
| Interculturality implies acceptance and respect for the different, without changing one's cultural identity, even in the daily search for dialogue, understanding, and collaboration | 25.6% | 28.2% |
| Interculturality means not only the acceptance and respect for what is different, but also an exchange that can lead to a change in some aspects of cultural identity in the daily search for dialogue, understanding, collaboration, in a perspective of mutual enrichment | 74.4% | 71.8% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Tab. 36 – Considering the definition of interculturality that you chose in the previous question, how would you rate the education context in which you live?

| | University | Community of consecrated life |
|----------------------------|------------|-------------------------------|
| Really intercultural | 48.0% | 38.4% |
| Sufficiently intercultural | 40.1% | 38.4% |
| Not very intercultural | 11.1% | 21.4% |
| Not intercultural at all | 0.9% | 1.7% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

* **A.** Interculturality implies acceptance and respect for the different, without changing one's cultural identity, even in the daily search for dialogue, understanding, and collaboration.

* **B.** Interculturality means not only the acceptance and respect for what is different, but also an exchange that can lead to a change in some aspects of cultural identity in the daily search for dialogue, understanding, and collaboration in a perspective of mutual enrichment.

The bivariate analysis of the two definitions of interculturality with respect to the question on the possible coexistence of people of different cultures, naturally shows higher percentages in correspondence to those responses that do not see this coexistence as possible and the first definition of multiculturalism, which does not foresee any change of individual cultural identities but simply a respectful acceptance of the "diversity".

Tab. 37 – Respondents based on the definition they give to interculturality and their opinion on the possible coexistence of people of different cultures

| | Definition A* | Definition B* | Total |
|---|---------------|---------------|--------|
| Yes, because we live in a multicultural world and living together with different cultures is already a reality. | 32.1% | 67.9% | 100.0% |
| Yes, because every culture has some elements that welcome other cultures | 17.5% | 82.5% | 100.0% |
| Yes, because the encounter with diversity enriches everyone | 21.4% | 78.6% | 100.0% |
| Yes, because cultural contamination is a sign of change but also of the vitality of a society | 0.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| Yes, but as long as there is no domination of one cultural model over another | 27.0% | 73.0% | 100.0% |
| No, because local cultures are increasingly characterized by closures and nationalisms | 50.0% | 50.0% | 100.0% |
| No, because it is difficult for any culture to open up to others | 50.0% | 50.0% | 100.0% |
| Total | 25.6% | 74.4% | 100.0% |

Age is another variable associated with the definitions of interculturality. As the age increases, the association with the second definition is stronger; vice versa, younger people are mostly associated with the former.

It seems that life experiences matured in strongly multicultural contexts generate an experience of mutual sharing and cultural contamination which is not yet experienced among the youngest respondents. The analysis of these two variables reinforces the idea that interculturality is a process that necessitates sufficiently prolonged life experiences in multicultural contexts so as to develop those intercultural competences and those contamination processes that would skew the choice towards the second definition.

Similarly, the educational level provides greater tools to read the complexity stemming from the coexistence between different cultures; and the second definition of interculturality captures a higher number of responses from participants that concluded second-cycle university studies.

The geographic origin sees Europeans more likely to choose the second definition, while the other macro-areas are typically aligned with the general average, excluding North Africa and North America, which register higher percentages on the first definition of interculturality. Students coming from these two geographic macro-areas are certainly affected by a context characterized by a strong identity, very unlikely to be opened to contamination. The permanence in Italy is another dimension that leans toward the second definition of interculturality, confirming what discussed so far.

Tab. 38 – Respondents based on the definition they give to interculturality and their length of stay in Italy (Italians are excluded)

| | Definition A* | Definition B* | Total |
|-------------------|---------------|---------------|--------|
| Less than a year | 31.7% | 68.3% | 100.0% |
| 1-2 years | 30.8% | 69.2% | 100.0% |
| 3-4 years | 26.3% | 73.7% | 100.0% |
| 5-6 years | 27.1% | 72.9% | 100.0% |
| More than 6 years | 26.0% | 74.0% | 100.0% |
| Total | 28.5% | 71.5% | 100.0% |

Another element that skews the choice towards the second definition of interculturality is the presence of previous experiences in multicultural contexts, prior to the arrival in Italy. Previous experiences in countries other than Italy contributed to additional intercultural competences and a greater ability to understand cultural diversities and observe reality from different perspectives.

Tab. 39 – Respondents based on the definition they give to interculturality and their previous experience of living with people of different nationality

| | | Definition A* | Definition B* | Total |
|---|-----|---------------|---------------|--------|
| Before living in this community of consecrated life, did you have other experiences of living with people of nationalities other than your own? | Yes | 24.7% | 75.3% | 100.0% |
| | No | 31.5% | 68.5% | 100.0% |
| Total | | 28.2% | 71.8% | 100.0% |

* **A.** Interculturality implies acceptance and respect for the different, without changing one's cultural identity, even in the daily search for dialogue, understanding, and collaboration.

* **B.** Interculturality means not only the acceptance and respect for what is different, but also an exchange that can lead to a change in some aspects of cultural identity in the daily search for dialogue, understanding, and collaboration in a perspective of mutual enrichment.

* **A.** Interculturality implies acceptance and respect for the different, without changing one's cultural identity, even in the daily search for dialogue, understanding, and collaboration.

* **B.** Interculturality means not only the acceptance and respect for what is different, but also an exchange that can lead to a change in some aspects of cultural identity in the daily search for dialogue, understanding, and collaboration in a perspective of mutual enrichment.

Among those who have chosen the first definition of interculturality, we can also notice a higher percentage in the case of students that experienced problems of integration. Although the causal directionality cannot be verified, it is possible to hypothesize that people not opened to cultural contamination are more likely to experience conflictual events and cultural misunderstandings.

Tab. 40 – Respondents based on the definition they give to interculturality and any problems of integration they had with people of a different nationality

| | | Definition A* | Definition B* | Total |
|--|-----|---------------|---------------|--------|
| In your university environment, did you ever have problems with people of a different nationality? | Yes | 24.7% | 75.3% | 100.0% |
| | No | 31.5% | 68.5% | 100.0% |
| Total | | 28.2% | 71.8% | 100.0% |

Coexistence of cultures is nowadays a reality, and it is perceived as an opportunity of personal enrichment. In summary, according to this survey, the identified factors that mostly contribute to view interculturality as a transformation process are: demographic age (as age increases, the association with the second definition is stronger; vice versa, younger people are more associated with the first definition); having matured multiple life experiences in multicultural contexts across different countries contributed to experiences of cultural contamination and mutual exchange; education level (it provides greater tools to read the complexity stemming from the coexistence between different cultures; and the second definition of interculturality captures a higher number of responses from participants that concluded second-cycle university studies).

4.4 Promoting intercultural dynamics

In contexts characterized by a strong multicultural component, intercultural competence has to be considered a “necessary competence to *think together* of a possible future”. In education contexts, it is necessary that students and educators get involved together to question their own beliefs and to begin observing things from different perspectives, relativizing and trying to facilitate and develop a new thinking¹².

In universities, several actions are put in place to promote intercultural dynamics, although most of them do not generate a reflection on the personal identity but only an exchange of practices which hardly lead to paths that are useful to resolve or concretely facilitate the problems related to intercultural coexistence.

On the contrary, in communities to consecrated life, the actions implemented to promote the intercultural dialogue are actualized in the presentation of the different customs and traditions of the different cultures belonging to the community, in Italian courses to facilitate deep dialogue, in initiatives that share the territorial context where a community is situated, and in laboratories for managing any conflicts determined by cultural diversity.

Instead, what respondents would like to see extends to a range of initiatives that involve with a greater extent mediation and conflict management.

4.5 Coexistence in multicultural education contexts

Coexistence among cultures is nowadays reality and participants' responses to survey's questions confirm this statement. This is particularly true in a perspective of enrichment.

An intercultural debate implies an effort of “comprehensive” views; not by chance, 79% of the respondents consider the “ability to understand the other’s viewpoint” as very useful.

It is unthinkable to have a natural transition from a *de facto* coexistence to an intercultural coexistence without having any regulative form for the exchanges, thus without a number of actions to be considered by the education communities in order to control the process. The actions carried out and investigated with the questionnaire are focused on language courses and on cultural knowledge: these are certainly useful, but are only early actions to those that should generate new forms of exchange and in which the intercultural component should play a determinant role in the learning process, by sharing one’s own experiences.

Tab. 41 – In your opinion, to what extent are the following elements more useful for living in a multicultural education context?

| | Very useful | Quite useful | Little useful | Not useful at all | I don't know | Total |
|---|-------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|--------|
| Ability to understand the other’s viewpoint | 79.1% | 18.7% | 2.1% | 0.0% | 0.2% | 100.0% |
| Ability to communicate appropriately and effectively | 73.3% | 24.7% | 1.1% | 0.6% | 0.4% | 100.0% |
| Ability to handle conflicts | 68.6% | 25.6% | 3.7% | 0.9% | 1.1% | 100.0% |
| Knowledge of the language | 68.4% | 28.0% | 3.2% | 0.2% | 0.2% | 100.0% |
| Knowledge of one’s own culture | 66.5% | 28.2% | 4.5% | 0.6% | 0.2% | 100.0% |
| Awareness that every culture is dynamic and plural | 65.0% | 29.9% | 3.7% | 0.4% | 0.9% | 100.0% |
| Ability to handle stereotypes and prejudices | 61.7% | 27.1% | 6.0% | 3.0% | 2.2% | 100.0% |
| Ability to decentralise and empathize | 61.1% | 29.0% | 6.0% | 0.9% | 3.0% | 100.0% |
| Ability to suspend judgment | 57.9% | 28.8% | 7.7% | 2.8% | 2.8% | 100.0% |
| Ability to find shared horizons | 57.0% | 36.1% | 5.6% | 0.4% | 0.9% | 100.0% |
| Willingness to tell your story | 53.1% | 40.0% | 4.9% | 1.7% | 0.4% | 100.0% |
| Knowledge of historical, political, religious backgrounds | 40.4% | 48.2% | 9.5% | 1.1% | 0.7% | 100.0% |

The education experience in a multicultural context is an additional educational element and allows one to acquire the ability to view and read the world from different perspectives, enriching the own cultural identity and facilitating the learning of new languages, as well as enhancing the soft skills, extremely useful for future educators or trainers of current modern societies.

Tab. 42 – Living in a multicultural formative context is giving you:

| | Very much agree | Quite agree | Little agree | Don't agree at all | Not responding | Total |
|---|-----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------|----------------|--------|
| The ability to see the world from different viewpoints | 73.3% | 23.0% | 2.4% | 0.9% | 0.4% | 100.0% |
| A plural and multicultural world view | 61.5% | 30.8% | 5.2% | 0.9% | 1.5% | 100.0% |
| An enrichment of my cultural identity | 58.1% | 33.3% | 6.0% | 2.1% | 0.6% | 100.0% |
| Knowledge of a language other than my own | 46.9% | 30.7% | 12.3% | 7.7% | 2.4% | 100.0% |
| The ability to empathise | 43.0% | 40.0% | 10.5% | 2.8% | 3.7% | 100.0% |
| The rediscovery of some aspects of my cultural tradition | 40.7% | 45.0% | 10.1% | 2.6% | 1.5% | 100.0% |
| The belief that it is better to be formed in a homogeneous cultural context | 16.3% | 24.5% | 25.4% | 27.9% | 6.0% | 100.0% |
| An impoverishment of my cultural identity | 12.7% | 13.1% | 17.2% | 52.0% | 5.0% | 100.0% |
| Stress/anxiety | 8.4% | 21.7% | 32.3% | 32.7% | 4.9% | 100.0% |
| Feeling often confused | 4.3% | 17.2% | 32.5% | 40.6% | 5.4% | 100.0% |
| Loneliness / Isolation | 3.7% | 11.8% | 29.5% | 48.0% | 6.9% | 100.0% |

5

Conclusions

In summary, the most relevant dimension in order to live in multicultural contexts with an intercultural approach is «[...] to be ready to change; we cannot communicate and relate to each other's differences while remaining ourselves. The possibility of living together requires certain skills and willingness of encountering the other and has a profound moral implication: the necessity of maintaining and losing, of facing fears and resistances, but also of going beyond our given identities»¹³.

This research has offered multiple clues that allow us to explain the circularity between multicultural contexts and the acquisition of intercultural competences, as well as revealing a weak action from institutions to manage intercultural processes. Such explicative elements should further guide institutions to implement formative actions to enhance intercultural competences that may accompany the academic and religious education, in order to avoid relying on single individuals only when managing their interpersonal dynamics in strongly multicultural environments.

The intercultural element should have a central role in the education path in order to prepare the ability of students and consecrated men and women to interpret and understand with a greater depth of analysis themselves as well as the contexts they will have to deal after their formative path, being thus able to take actions openly, with dialogue and cooperation



Endnotes

1. UNESCO, *Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue*. UNESCO World Report; Executive summary, UNESCO, Paris 2009, 11.
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3. Cf. E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI, *Interculturality in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities: An Action-Research-Training Project in Italy*, in I.D. (eds.), *Education in Multiculturality, Education to Interculturality in Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy*, Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2023, 33-68.
4. Cf. *ibid.*, 62.
5. Cf. P.E. BALBONI – F. CAON, *La comunicazione interculturale*, Marsilio, Venezia 2015.
6. Cf. J.W. CRESWELL – V.L. PLANO CLARK, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, SAGE publications, Thousand Oaks, CA 2017 e S. MAUCERI, *Qualità nella quantità. La Survey Research nell'era dei Mixed Methods*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2019.
7. Cf. D.K. DEARDORFF, *Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization*, "Journal of Studies in International Education" 10 (2006) 3, 241-266.
8. Cf. *Questionnaire*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 366-382.
9. Cf. S. MAUCERI – M.P. FAGGIANO – L. DI CENSI, *Survey 2.0. L'indagine con questionario nell'era digitale*, "Sociologia e ricerca sociale" 121 (2020) 25-48.
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12. Cf. M. BAIUTTI, *La competenza interculturale per pensare assieme un futuro possibile*, "MeTis" 5 (2015) 1, 332.
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Intercultural Competences under Construction

Qualitative Analysis of Narration of Critical Incidents by a Group of University Students*

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Abstract

This chapter presents the tool, the procedure and the results that emerged from the 'narration of critical incidents' experienced in multicultural contexts. The object of study is therefore the experience of multiculturalism and interculturality lived in educational, professional and life contexts and also the development of skills for experiencing a fruitful exchange – as it emerges in the narratives of a group almost entirely of university students. The analysis – conducted with qualitative methods – focuses on situations that give rise to critical incidents, immediate thoughts, emotions, actions and recognized skills. The aim of the activity and the survey is to focus on the development of intercultural competences in multicultural educational contexts.

Keywords

Intercultural skills – Intercultural competence – Intercultural education – Qualitative methods – Critical incidents

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* Translated from the original Italian by Vera Kopsaj

1

The context

This chapter reports the results of the analysis of ‘narration of critical incidents’ obtained with the support of a qualitative tool used in the action-research-training project, entitled *Multiculturalism and Intercultural Competences in Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities of Consecrated Life*¹. The same tool was also used by the author for the collection and processing of the documentation prior to 2017².

In 2018, with the launch of the qualitative phase of the survey presented in this volume, the activity ‘*Narration of a Challenging Situation in a Multicultural Context*’ was proposed as an optional activity to the participants during the third focus group meetings in which students – from a part of academic and ecclesiastical institutions and members of formative communities of Institutes of Consecrated Life located in Italy – participated. The intent was twofold: a) to have a formative impact on the participants and b) to gather information on how interculturality is perceived and experienced in educational and other multicultural life contexts, what competences are needed to live interculturality and how to develop them.

The initial inspiration for this work came from a comparison with the methods, tools and results of a survey conducted by researchers of the Catholic University of Milan through its Research Centre on Intercultural Relations. The team, directed by Milena Santerini, aimed to «trace – in the concrete professional practices of teachers and educational workers – the intercultural competences actually exercised»³; specifically, «three crucial competences for intercultural work were investigated: interpreting cultures, reducing prejudices, finding common horizons»⁴. The work presented here draws inspiration from the research of the University of Milan, but it was developed in a different context, with different aims and procedures, redefined in relation to a broader research of which it is a part.

2

Hypothesis and purpose

The guiding hypothesis of this paper is in line with the action-research-training hypothesis set out in this volume. In educational contexts characterised by multiculturalism where the coexistence between people and groups belonging to other cultures is accepted – experienced as an opportunity and valued as a richness – one can detect an interrelated set of general or transversal competences (communicative basic relational competences) and specific or intercultural competences in the strict sense that attest to the fact that a dialogue and reciprocal exchange is taking place which opens up the possibility of experiencing interculturality as an intentional process that manifests itself when there are phenomena of interchange and reciprocal transformation/enrichment at a personal and institutional level⁵. These competences tend to develop over time and imply a *construction* work that is the task of the subject and is supported by the environment. The choice of using the verb *to construct* for specifying the work of personal development of intercultural competences recalls both the responsibility of the subject – who is the protagonist of this construction – and the contribution and support of various formative environments, in particular formal ones, but also non-formal and informal⁶.

Education to interculturality is a current and urgent challenge that questions educational, professional and social contexts at all levels. In particular, it obliges institutions in which educators, teachers and other educational professionals are trained, to take stock of the education and teaching/learning actions and strategies put in place to promote and support the development of both personal competences to live interculturality and professional competences of a pedagogical nature to enable themselves to educate others to develop such competences.

After presenting the hypothesis, it is necessary to clarify the meaning attributed to the terms before proceeding to the description of the other aspects.

The construct 'intercultural competence(s)' has been the subject of research for decades in an international context: there are many convergences, but there is no agreement on an unambiguous definition that accounts for its complex nature⁷. In this work I use the expression in the plural⁸ – intercultural living competences – referring to an 'interrelated set', conceived as a 'system', of competences, both specific (intercultural in the strict sense) and general or transversal (basic communicative and relational), that two or more persons put into action in the interaction and mutual interchange in multicultural contexts. These competences may be thought of as an articulated, interconnected and dynamic 'system' of proven capacities to use – in training, work, life situations in contact with people (and/or groups) who are bearers of cultural, linguistic, value diversity – knowledge, skills and internal dispositions (attitudes, values) enabling both to activate an appropriate, vital and fruitful interaction and interchange.

Intercultural competences are thus a dynamic complex of competences and sub-competences that are interrelated and 'interpenetrated'. The use of the term 'interpenetration' – recently re-proposed by Michele Pellerey who refers to John Dewey – draws attention to the integration of the person's stable internal dispositions, «understood as an interconnected and coherent set of attitudes, meanings, knowledge, skills and *patterns* or models of behaviour; neither single specific behaviours, nor disconnected sets of performances (Dewey, 1958)»⁹. The implications of this view for those involved in education are obvious: learning (and teaching) the competences to live interculturality requires a focus on promoting not only single components (knowledge, skills, internal dispositions) at various levels but also the interpenetration of all the components, the ability to manage them to the best of one's ability and the willingness and decision to continue to increase and develop them over time. A person who is competent in experiencing interculturality manifests – as Milena Santerini states – a marked 'intercultural sensitivity'; he/she has a dynamic, open, plural vision of cultures understood as complex entities; he/she is aware of his/her own cultural identity and multiple affiliations and is willing to rediscover it in the confrontation and exchange with people different from him/herself; he/she is capable of interpreting and understanding cultures in a critical way, overcoming universalist and absolute relativist visions; he/she is able to recognise the various factors that come into play in the interaction; he/she is empathetic and able to decentralise, open to dialogue and self-disclosure; he/she knows how to listen and communicate in a correct, effective and appropriate manner; knows how to manage stereotypes and prejudices and is willing to accept others with trust, respect and curiosity; he/she knows how to seek/find together with others the reasons for living together in a balance between respect for difference and the search for common horizons and shared values¹⁰.

An interculturally competent person is therefore able to interact in situations of high cultural differentiation both by activating, integrating, coordinating and operating one's own internal cognitive, affective-relational-communicative, motivational and volitional resources, – i.e. a set of consolidated knowledge and competences and other stable internal dispositions (such as curiosity and interest in the other, readiness to tell one's own story) – and by using the available external resources in a coherent and effective manner¹¹. Authors have elaborated various models, frameworks, lists or repertoires of intercultural competences and agree in highlighting their multidimensional nature and in recognising that these competences manifest themselves with different degrees of maturity and develop over time, dynamically, in various formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts through long and articulated processes¹².

This conception of competences for experiencing interculturality is the basis of the present exploratory survey, which aims to probe how these competences are actually experienced in educational and other life contexts. The survey has a dual – *education and research* – purpose, i.e. it aims to:

- *raise participant's awareness* in the participants – through reflection on their own experience in multicultural contexts – of the challenges and opportunities posed by interaction with people from cultures different from one's own, and of the resources (knowledge, skills, internal dispositions) that are necessary to relate with an intercultural approach in educational, professional and life contexts in a perspective of mutual transformation/enrichment;
- *know and analyse* challenging situations experienced in educational, professional and life contexts in order to identify problems and opportunities related to the development and promotion of intercultural sensitivity, to bring out the resources (knowledge, skills, internal dispositions) that people consciously put (or could put) in place to realise truly intercultural encounters and exchanges and to identify effective educational paths and strategies.

3

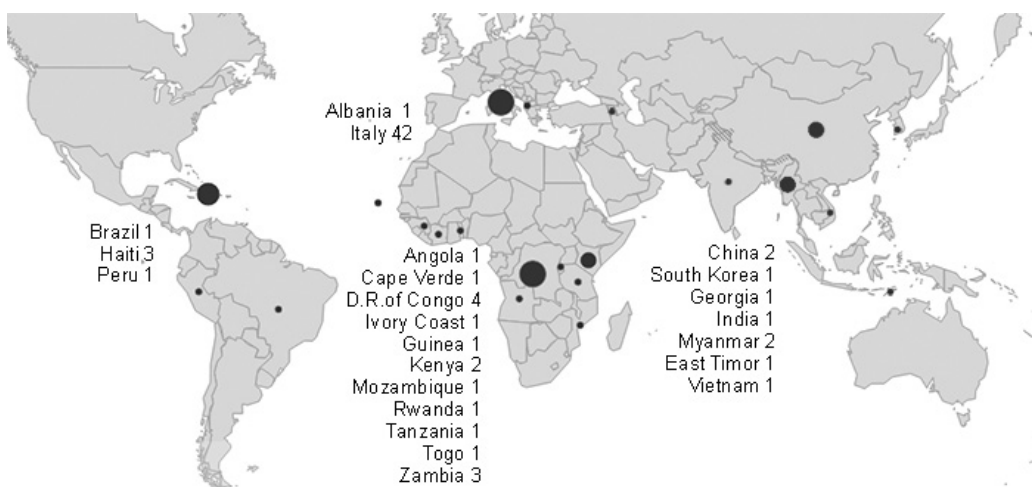
Participants

There are 75 participants. The group consists of women religious and lay students and one male student¹³. The majority (69) attended the Master's Degree Courses at PFSEA in Rome and followed the teaching of Intercultural Pedagogy between 2017 and 2021.

The activity, which started in September 2018, was presented and proposed as an optional free activity to the participants in the third focus group of the research *Intercultural Competences in Universities and Consecrated Life*; 23 out of 167 had given their availability for the realisation of this activity, but only 6 of them completed the work as requested in the months of February to May 2020, in online mode with the guidance and support of a tutor¹⁴.

A total of 75 participants completed the activity: 42 were Italian and 33 were of other nationalities. All the participants were resident in Italy either for reasons of study, mission in an Institute of Consecrated Life or previous migration. The 23 countries of birth of the participants, including Italy, distributed by continent are shown in Figure 1. By marital status, 41 lay women, 33 women religious and 1 man religious took part. The average age of the participants is around 30.

Fig. 1 – Geographical origin of the 75 participants (23 countries)



Participants (75) come from 23 countries: 11 from Africa (17), 3 from America (5), 7 from Asia (10), 2 from Europe (43). The 33 non-Italian students are temporarily resident in Italy for reasons of study or belonging to a religious institute. Some participants (3) emigrated to Italy from another country in a period prior to their study years.

The methodology draws inspiration from Italian and international research and various approaches including the narration of practices¹⁵, the analysis of critical incidents¹⁶ and the *atelier* of intercultural situations¹⁷.

In the narration of practices, the narrative, explanatory and argumentative approach is often used with professionals. Scholars from the Catholic University of Milan who conducted the research, from which this paper has taken its cue, took up and adapted a Canadian model by Serge Desgagné and created a clear and effective working outline and procedure¹⁸. In the Canadian model described by Geneviève Audet, the narration of practices is «understood as a narrative of a situation-problem encountered by a teacher»¹⁹; the procedure consists of asking a group of teachers to formulate an initial draft of a narration of a practice experienced in a multicultural context, which is then rewritten by the researcher. In the next phase, the stories are analysed and grouped around certain stages that indicate the passage from a level of deficiency in the capacity for inter-subjective relations and consideration of the other to a level that denotes sensitivity and competence in establishing an inter-subjective relationship²⁰. During the analysis, the researcher pays attention both to the facts told and to the meanings that the teller attributes to the facts²¹. The aim of the investigation is, therefore, to document and recognise (and teach to recognise) the knowledge that the person develops in the course of action by reflecting in action and on action in everyday life situations. It is a process of 'reflective conversation' with the situation, which practitioners carry out both when they have to solve a problem (reflection in the course of the action) and when they reflect on the action performed (reflection on the action)²².

The Italian research presented by Milena Santerini and Piergiorgio Reggio takes the Canadian model described by Audet and adapts it, with the intention of favouring the emergence and description of implicit and hidden elements in the experience of the interviewees and, specifically, of «tracing – in the concrete professional practices of teachers and educational workers – the intercultural competences actually exercised»²³. The researchers identified and proposed to the 45 participants to narrate practices related to three specific competences, understanding cultures, reducing prejudice and building shared horizons, and adopted a procedure based on Pierre Vermersch's technique of the action explication interview²⁴.

In the present project, the methodological framework takes up only some aspects of the model described above and integrates them with other approaches including the narration of critical incidents and – in some aspects – it also draws inspiration from the *atelier* experience of intercultural situations. The devised procedure consists in activating a process of individual reflection and writing, guided and supported at all stages by an educator or tutor, and of setting up moments of confrontation and exchange between colleagues within the group. The tool is a sheet containing the description of the work to be carried out in several stages or moments and the outline for the identification and detailed description of a challenging situation experienced first-hand by the person reporting²⁵.

Participants are asked to describe in a detailed, but concise manner, a challenging situation or event to be understood, not only as a problematic incident or event – i.e. an unusual, disconcerting, irritating event that may have generated misunderstandings, problems or conflicts – but also as an episode of effective and positive interaction and interchange in a multicultural context – i.e. an event experienced by the protagonist as surprising in a positive and pleasant sense.

When dealing with written narratives, it is useful to remember that these are interpretations arising from reflection on experienced events – i.e. remembered facts – to

which the narrator has attributed a meaning *a posteriori*. The very choice of identifying a given situation as challenging is already a fact that says something about the writer and this must be taken into account when analysing the stories since, as Luigina Mortari points out, “it depends on a plurality of factors: one’s cultural background, one’s educational history, the role one plays, the emotional situation one finds oneself in at that precise moment, the perspectives one nurtures”²⁶. Without forgetting that the reader also has to deal with his own interpretations.

5 The procedure and the tool

When handing over the activity, participants were invited by the educator/tutor to narrate a challenging event or situation they had experienced in an academic, professional or everyday life context in interaction with a person (or persons) from a culture different from their own, in order to bring out the competences (knowledge, skills, internal dispositions) that the teller believes he/she put into practice in that situation. Through the story and with the help of an outline of questions and suggestions, either provided by the educator/tutor or emerged in the discussion with one or more colleagues, participants had the opportunity to reflect on their own experience, to analyse thoughts, emotions and actions, to clarify and make explicit the underlying dynamics and to bring out the competences they had implemented, often in a non-reflective and unconscious way, or those they could have implemented. They also questioned where and how the development of these competences takes place.

The tool – as already mentioned – is similar to the one designed and used by the researchers of the Catholic University of Milan²⁷, but it has been modified and adapted to be applied to different purposes and recipients and with a different procedure than the previous research. It is a form that contains the outline of personal work and the indications for drafting an account of a challenging situation – which the participants describe in detail – highlighting the experience they have gone through and the resources (knowledge, skills, internal dispositions) they have put in place. The drafting process includes moments of individual work guided by the educator and moments of discussion both in pairs and in groups with the person guiding the process (Fig. 3).

The drafting of the form entitled *Narration of a Challenging Situation in a Multicultural Context* is one of the activities required of students to pass the Intercultural Pedagogy course examination and is carried out in three stages through personalised tutoring and discussion with colleagues. In the experience carried out with the participants in the research *Intercultural Competences in Universities and Consecrated Life*, the procedure was revised and adapted to be offered entirely online: there was no exchange with the other participants, but there was a comparison and an exchange with the tutor; the tool and the activity remained substantially unchanged. Figure 2 shows the presentation sheet of the activity and the procedure; Figure 3 shows the outline that the participants used to write their story.

Fig. 2 – Presentation of the activity and online procedure

| PURPOSE OF THE ACTIVITY | |
|--|--|
| Describe the resources and competences deployed by the author in a challenging and/or problematic incident experienced when interacting with people from a culture different from your own in your everyday life context (university environment, work context, consecrated life community). | |
| METHODOLOGY | |
| The activity uses the methodology of narrating practice. Initially, the participants are asked to narrate in written and detailed form an incident experienced in a multicultural context; subsequently, they are asked to reflect on the intercultural competences implemented to deal with the situation described, i.e. the thoughts, emotions, actions implemented in the interaction with one or more people belonging to a culture different from one's own. | |
| STAGES, TIMING AND PROCEDURE | |
| TIMING | ACTIVITIES |
| First Stage: Narrate a challenging event or situation | |
| 30 minutes* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify in your life experience in the multicultural educational context in which you are embedded (living community or university environment) a single incident you experienced as challenging that relates to the interaction between you and one or more members belonging to a culture different from your own. Once chosen, please describe it in detail using the attached form. Once finished, kindly send your story by e-mail. |
| Second Stage: Reread and enrich your story | |
| 15 minutes* | <p><i>If necessary,</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> based on the reply you receive by email – in the light of the comments and follow-up questions sent to you – revise your narrative, enriching it with details, to make it clearer and more comprehensive. Once finished, kindly send your narrative by email. |
| Third stage: Analyse intercultural competence | |
| 15 minutes* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reread the final version of your narrative, identify one or more skills you implemented in the challenging and/or problematic situation you narrated and write them down in the space provided. Describe the resources you activated, i.e. the knowledge, skills and internal dispositions (attitudes, values) you put into action in the situation. Afterwards, if you wish, you may also fill in the section 'Any remarks'. Finally, assign an evocative title to the narrated event, which is representative of the listed competence(s). Once you have finished, kindly send your narrative by email. |
| Fourth Stage: Submit final version | |
| 15 minutes* | <p><i>If necessary,</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in the light of the comments and suggestions provided to you by email, revise your 'Form', draft the final version and kindly send it by email. |

* The requested work must be completed no later than 1 week from the date of receipt of the reply email. The time indicated in the first column is only an indication.

Fig. 3 – Working track

* The module was designed by Enrica Ottone based on the model of the tool used in the research conducted by the team at the Catholic University of Milan through the Research Centre on Intercultural Relations. Cf. P. REGGIO, *La ricerca sulle competenze interculturali di insegnanti ed educatori*, in Id. – SANTERINI (eds.), *Le competenze*, 60.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A CHALLENGING INCIDENT OR PROBLEMATIC EVENT YOU EXPERIENCED IN A MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT</p> <p><i>Describe the situation in detail, dwell on concrete details and avoid generalisations; describe the context in which the incident took place and explain how it happened; dwell on each stage; describe your experience and possible interpretations of the event (yours and those of the people involved).</i></p> | <p>First stage <i>The following questions can help you clarify and describe the situation:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When and in what context did the episode occur? <i>Please describe briefly.</i> • Who are the persons involved? <i>Describe the protagonists, clarify their role and, if necessary, state whether other people witnessed the event.</i> • What happened? <i>Describe the event by detailing what happened at the beginning, during and afterwards.</i> • What did you think? What did you feel? How did you behave? • <i>Tell your thoughts, your emotions, what you said and/or did.</i> • What meaning do you attribute to the event? <i>Please explain what the event meant to you.</i> • In your opinion, what significance did people from a different culture than yours attribute to the event? <i>Imagine how he/she experienced the event (what he/she thought and felt) and describe his/her interpretation of the event.</i> |
| <p>TITLE OF THE EVENT <i>(you can assign it at the end of the activity)</i></p> | <p>Second stage <i>Write a title, i.e. a concise and effective expression to summarise your narrative.</i></p> |
| <p>CONTEXT, PERIOD</p> | <p><i>Indicate the context and period in which the incident occurred (e.g. community of life, or university or work environment...).</i></p> |
| <p>COMPETENCE <i>taken into consideration</i></p> | <p>Third and fourth stages <i>Write down the main competence you implemented (e.g.: I was able to decentralise, or I understood the other person's point of view, or I was able to recognise my own prejudices...).</i></p> |
| <p>RESOURCES YOU ACTIVATED IN THE SITUATION</p> | |
| <p>Knowledge</p> | <p><i>Ask the tutor to send you some examples if you need help filling in this and the following lines.</i></p> |
| <p>Skills</p> | |
| <p>Internal Provisions <i>(values, attitudes)</i></p> | |
| <p>ANY COMMENTS</p> | |

The stages shown in the overview in Figure 2 are the same as those followed in the first part of the project, although it was not possible to include group exchange moments in the online experience. The educator or tutor – in each phase – had the task of giving written feedback to the participants through comments or questions to clarify the narrative or questions to stimulate further reflection. In the following two examples, the tutor’s questions are put in square brackets.

“After a long discussion together with the other group members, we agreed on the steps we could take [What did you discuss? Summarise what you said to each other, how the discussion took place, what did you do]” (31_Rel).

“The rejection [Are you sure it was rejection? Could there have been a misunderstanding?] that I encountered from the parents initially in the interview was that they did not believe that their child could behave in the way I described to them because he did not behave like that at home” (2_IT_Lai).

6

Analysis of the results

The analysis of texts, already available in written form, requires a qualitative research approach that allows the deployment of a set of interconnected interpretative practices, in order to achieve a better understanding of reality in its complexity. In education and training, it is important to provide for the personal involvement and participation of the researcher, with a view to a better understanding of the object of investigation.

The 75 narratives written by the participants in this research were collected by the author over a period of three years and then subjected to content analysis (*Qualitative Content Analysis*), a qualitative approach based on explicit rules of analysis and interpretation of written texts. This approach involves the refinement and use of categories or codes that the researchers can establish in three ways:

- a priori, on the basis of a previously provided theory or outline of questions (deductive or *top-down* approach);
- during the analysis, through an inductive process starting from the material itself (inductive or *bottom-up* approach);
- by combining the two previous approaches, i.e. by considering both the research questions defined a priori and the categories that emerge during the analysis phase that allow the codes to be refined²⁸.

The analysis of the content of the written forms that the participants handed in on file was carried out through a labour-intensive process and coding procedure. First of all, the forms were sorted, numbered, analysed, classified and recorded in a database in which some general information useful to describe the characteristics of the participants (type, sex, age, marital status, country of origin, work position) and the general aspects of the narrated incident (title attributed to the event, year, place, context, focus, role of the narrator, origin of the other person/group) were collected²⁹.

In a second step, the 75 documents were imported into the MAXQDA software³⁰ and were organised into subfolders according to the ‘context’ variable in which the incidents described took place (university, workplace, communities of consecrated life, other contexts)³¹. The work of reading, selecting sentences or entire paragraphs and assigning codes then began. The content encoding process in qualitative research is complex and the coder can make mistakes in interpretation, which is why in this specific case the coding was done by two people in order to detect convergences and possible discrepancies³². In order to ‘make sense’ of the large amount

of research data (the text corpus consisted of 44,432 words), a mixed approach was adopted: bottom-up, typical of *Grounded Theory*, and top-down. After analysing slightly less than half of the documents, the coding work was interrupted in order to relate the created codes, unify some of them, create aggregations and specify certain codings. The MAXQDA software that transposes the coding into graphic form was useful both during the work and for visualising the aggregations in maps.

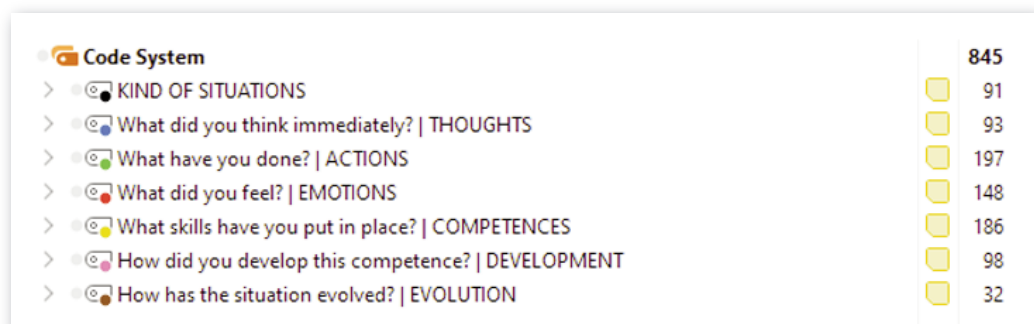
In the analysis phase, in addition to the quantitative aspects, the qualitative aspects that emerged from the variety of situations and contexts described were mainly noted. The qualitative analysis of the narratives required an initial assessment of the documents based on the questions posed in the question outline that participants followed in writing their narratives; the analysis was conducted in an open manner through the problematisation and classification of the various parts of the text and the identification of subcategories which – since they were not defined a priori – were subject to continuous revision and clarification.

The questions proposed to the participants in the work tool (Fig. 3) were the starting point for the analysis of the narratives which then focused on the following issues:

1. What kind of *challenging situations* did they narrate?
2. What was their *first thought*?
3. What *emotions* did they feel?
4. What *actions* have they taken?
5. What *skills* did they apply?
6. How did they *develop the competences* they demonstrated?
7. What *effects* did the activity have on the narrator? Has there been an evolution?

The summary table of the code system of the analysis carried out with MAXQDA software is shown in Figure 4. The encoded segments – on the total textual body which was composed of 44,432 words – are in total 845, divided into seven macro-categories that refer to the questions listed above. Each category is structured within it into subcategories. In total, the codebook is made up of 130 codes (Appendix).

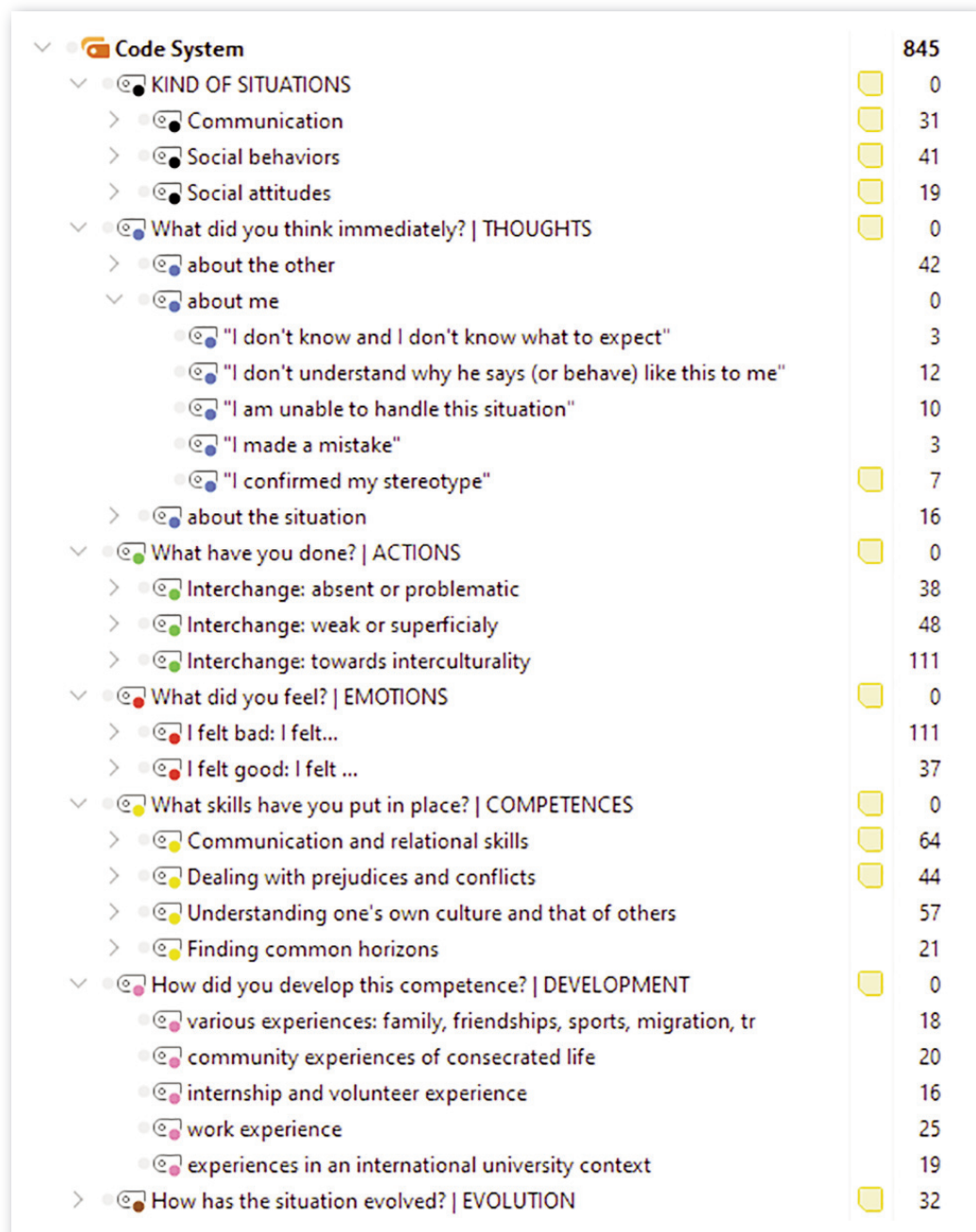
Fig. 4 – The code system: seven macro-categories



Source: 'Critical Incidents' project developed with MAXQDA software (15/12/2021)

The seven macro-categories listed in Figure 4 (*Situations, Thoughts, Actions, Emotions, Competences, Development, Evolution*³³) were used to analyse the content of all documents in order to identify the respective categories and subcategories of codes inherent to the questions posed to the participants. In the first stage of the analysis, a hybrid approach was followed – i.e. initially open codings were assigned and then the codes were reorganised and systematised within each macro-category in a hierarchical manner³⁴. The figure below provides an overview of the categories identified with reference to the first five macro-categories (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5 – The code system: seven macro-categories with their respective categories



Source: 'Critical Incidents' project developed with MAXQDA software (15/12/2021)

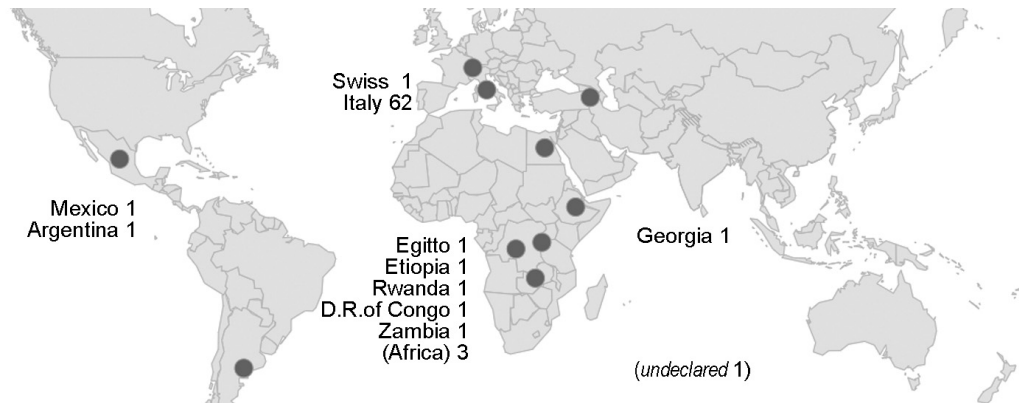
In the next sections, I will present the results of the qualitative analysis conducted on the first five macro-categories in the following order: the types of challenging situations, the thoughts formulated in the immediate situation, the emotions felt, and the actions and skills that the participants recognise having implemented in the narrated episodes. Finally, I provide some results on the development and effects of the activity.

6.1 Challenging situations

The situations described by the participants describe a varied set of interaction experiences lived in educational, professional or life contexts that led – depending on the case – to a meeting and an exchange and/or – in most cases – to a misunderstanding

or a real clash between the narrator and one or more persons with linguistic and cultural differences. Almost all the students at the time of compilation resided in Italy, so most of the events narrated are set, in fact, in Italy; just over a dozen participants report experiences that took place in other geographical contexts, as depicted in Figure 6.

Fig. 6 – The geographical context in which the events are set



Participants (75) narrate events that took place in 10 countries: 8 in Africa, 2 in America, 1 in Asia, 63 in Europe of which 62 in Italy.

Events are thus distributed in relation to the life contexts in which they occurred:

- 24 in workplaces (nursery schools, schools, residential communities for minors, gyms);
- 20 in communities of Institutions of Consecrated Life;
- 16 in places of training (summer camp, catechesis), voluntary work and mission;
- 8 in university settings;
- 7 in other contexts (family, public establishments).

Most of the narrated events occurred in Italy (83%). Only 17% of the incidents occurred in other geographical contexts: in the country of origin (4 non-Italians); in volunteering experiences or international travel (4 Italians); on a mission (5 non-Italian men/women religious).

The narratives of challenging situations were analysed and labelled or coded and then the various typologies were grouped into three categories. Some narratives referred to more than one type of challenging situation: in 15 cases, 2 different codes were therefore assigned in the same form and in one case 3. In total, coded segments referring to the type of situation are thus 91 and are distributed in the following three categories:

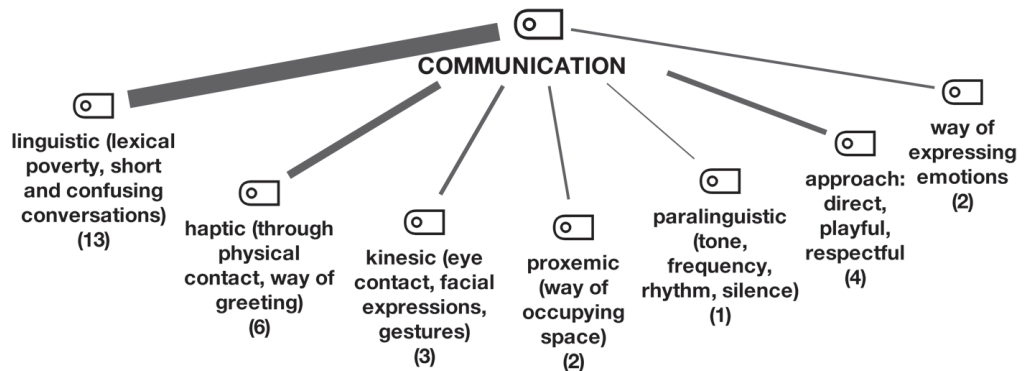
- *Communication* (31), with 7 subcategories (Fig. 7);
- *Social behaviours* (41), with 10 subcategories (Fig. 8);
- *Social attitudes* (19), with 4 subcategories (Fig. 9).

Analysing the cases in which two or more codifications referring to the type of situation were attributed to the same narrative, it is interesting to note that 10 out of 15 cases refer to communicative aspects (of which 7 linguistic) that are combined with other communicative aspects or with aspects concerning social behaviours and social attitudes. The linguistic aspect (lexical poverty, short and confusing conversations) is the most recurrent not only in relation to the *Communication* category but also to the other two (Chart 1).

6.1.1 Communication³⁵

Communication category could have been included as a subcategory of *Social behaviours*, but due to its high frequency it was considered separately. There are, in fact, 31 incidents centred on challenging situations concerning interpersonal communication – both verbal and non-verbal – which generated confusion, misunderstanding, disagreement, prejudice and – in some cases – even conflict. Figure 7 shows the frequency with which the 7 subcategories relating to *Communication* recur in the stories.

Fig. 7 – Types of challenging situations grouped under the category Communication



Source: The figure is generated with the MAXQDA software using the code-subcode hierarchical model function.

The verbal and non-verbal communicative aspect is the most recurrent challenging factor and appears in more than a third (28) of the 75 narratives. The percentages of codings referring to this category are distributed as follows: 17.3% of the participants question the lack of knowledge of the language and lexical poverty that generate short and confusing conversations; 8% indicate the haptic dimension (i.e. misunderstandings due to a different way of greeting or handling physical contact); 5.3% refer to misunderstandings inherent to a different communicative approach (direct, joking, or reserved and respectful style); finally, a few others indicate aspects concerning kinesics, proxemics, paralinguistics, the way of expressing emotions (Graf. 1).

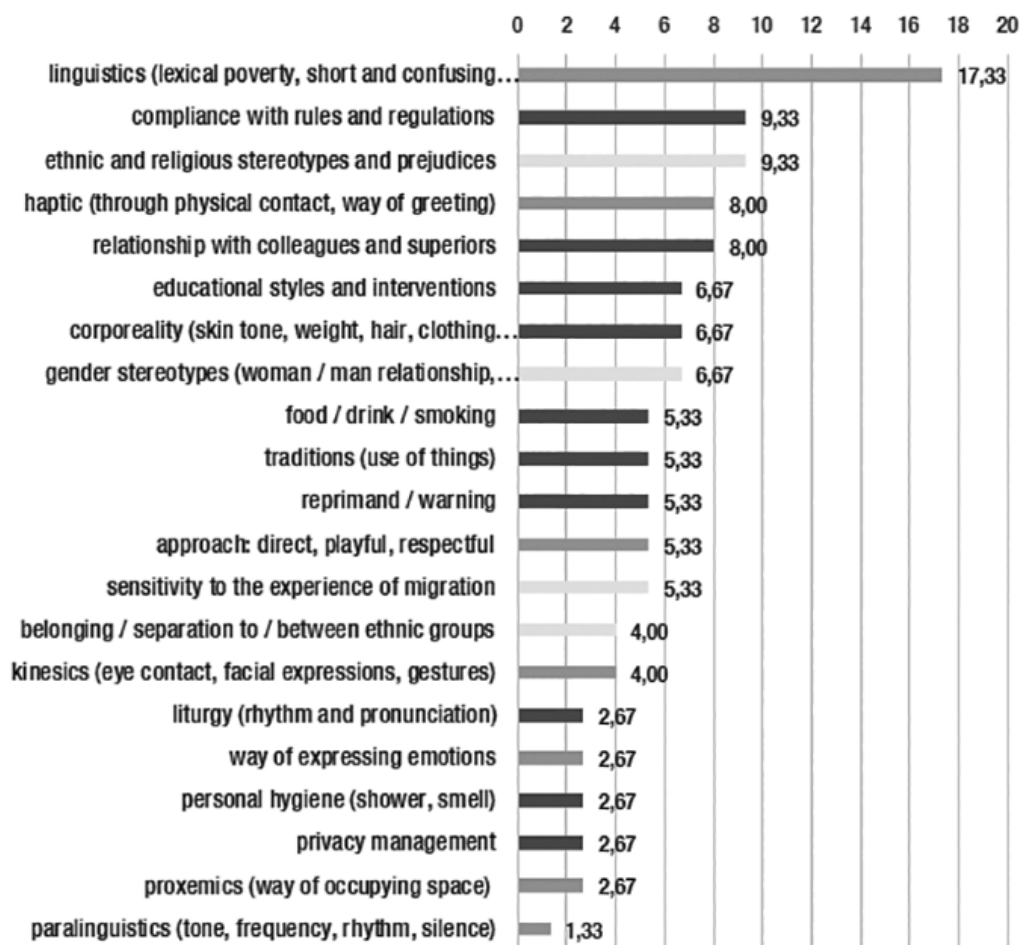
The linguistic difficulties that appear in 13 narratives refer to a lack of knowledge of Italian or the other person's language; lexical poverty hinders or prevents communication and mutual understanding, and is a source of unease and closure. An Italian educator, working in a nursery school, expresses it this way:

“Last year, however, I felt a sense of difficulty, incomprehension and embarrassment interacting with a Filipino mother. It was September, during one of the most delicate periods at the nursery school, that of acclimatisation. Usually, in this circumstance, I confront the parents to get more information about the habits and, in general, the way of being of the children. The mother's lack of knowledge of the Italian language and my unwillingness to accept the difficulty she showed had initially made this stage impossible. In fact, I could not understand what she wanted to tell me and I could not communicate my thoughts to her and so our conversations were brief, fleeting and confusing” (17_IT_Lai).

A Zambian woman religious living in a formation community of an Institution of Consecrated Life in Italy narrates the communication difficulties she encounters:

“Because of the language difficulties, it is tiring for me to participate because when it comes to speaking in a discussion or reading a text in public, some sis

Graph. 1 – Percentages of codes in the subcategory of challenging situations (out of total documents)



Source: The figure is generated with the MAXQDA software using the statistics function.

ters want words to be pronounced correctly and expect speakers of another language to read exactly like Italians. So, knowing this, I stopped participating” (19_ZA_Rel).

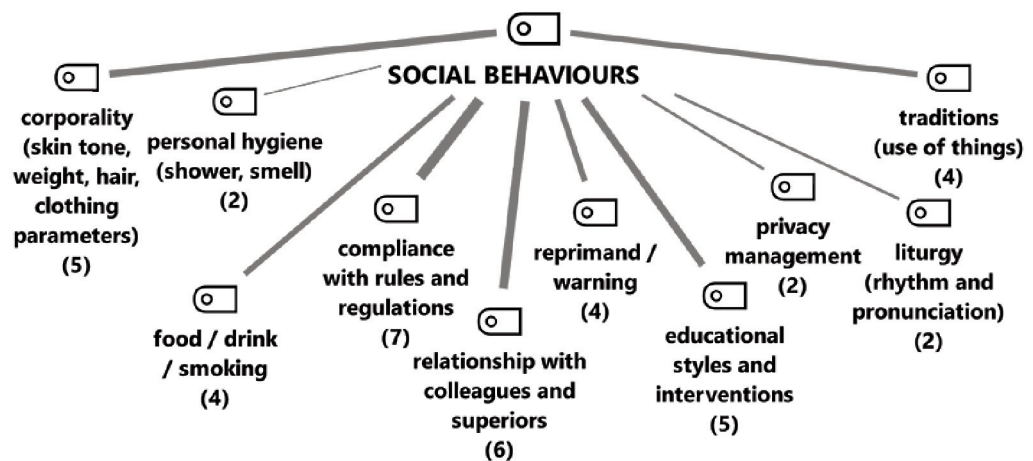
In the participants’ narratives, body language – which is partly innate and partly learned through socialisation processes – also generates incidents and challenging situations and is a source of misunderstandings due to one or more aspects of communication: paralinguistics (tone, frequency, rhythm and silence); kinesics (eye contact, facial expressions, gestures); proxemics (way of occupying space); haptics (communicative messages expressed through physical contact, e.g. greeting gestures). The following is an example narrated by a Congolese woman religious:

“On the day of the feast [...] one of us gave a shout of joy as is usually done in sub-Saharan tradition. Unfortunately, this shout was not pleasant for a person who directly expressed his displeasure. I was hurt and immediately felt that we were being judged. In my context this shout is an honour, a sign of blessing, a wish, a ‘being with’, it is acceptance of the person, it is telling the person that we love them. A particular event without this shout is a sign of a hidden problem” (69_CO_Rel).

6.1.2 Social behaviours

In the category of grouped situations – labelled *Social behaviours* – there are ten subcategories concerning habits and customs in taking food and drink or smoking; aspects related to corporeity (considering skin tone, weight, hair, clothing parameters); customs in personal hygiene; rules for the management of privacy; the way of relating to colleagues and superiors; the way of expressing and/or receiving a reprimand/rebuke; attitudes towards respecting rules and regulations; ways and styles of educational intervention and other customs and traditions (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8 – Types of challenging situations grouped in the Social behaviours category



Source: The figure is generated with MAXQDA using the hierarchical code-subcode model function

The situation that recurs most often (7) in the narratives of this category concerns *compliance with rules and regulations*. Here is an example given by a Haitian nun.

“There were two of us giving catechesis to a group of First Communion children. During two meetings, one of them behaved inappropriately: he didn’t listen, disturbed the other children and did the opposite of what we catechists were proposing to the group. After the second time, when the mother came to pick him up, we explained the situation and the mother said: “I’m sorry” and gave the boy a kiss. This behaviour annoyed me and I got angry because I expected her to reprimand the boy and ask him not to repeat the behaviour he had had, instead she gave him a kiss. I thought this behaviour would incentivise the boy to continue doing the same. For me it is wrong to react in this way when faced with such behaviour from the boy” (24_HA_Rel).

In interpreting the incident, the student does not mention other factors that may come into play such as the age of the children or other contextual variables; on the contrary, by reporting her thoughts, she expresses a judgement that seems to put an end to the possibility of dialogue.

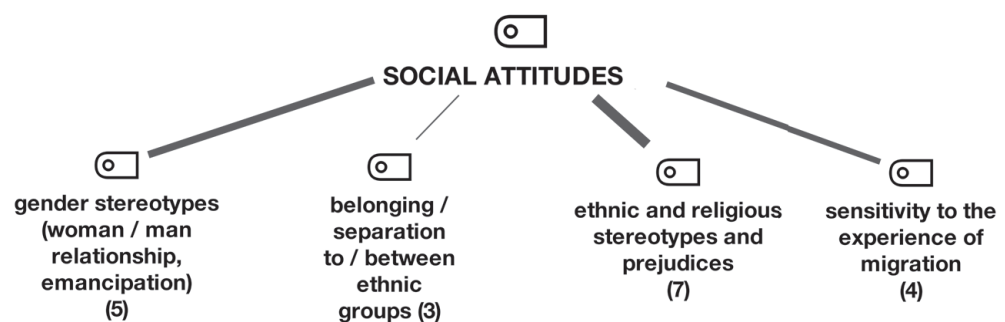
In other episodes, too, the narrator sometimes does not seem aware of the complexity of the factors that come into play and draws hasty conclusions attributing the misunderstanding or the difficulty or the distance of positions to presumed and stereotyped differences that might exist in the style and way of behaving without actually knowing and investigating them. Another example that has been codified in *educational styles and interventions*³⁶ is the following:

“One problematic situation I faced was at the summer centre in my role as co-ordinator of the primary school sector. During a day of intensive training while we were analysing together the activities that the animators were to carry out with the children during the summer centre, a Vietnamese nun approached me to tell me that she did not agree and would not carry out the activity described, as in her culture the game – in particular one of the gestures required of children during play (passing under the spread legs of a companion) – was inappropriate” (49_IT_Lai).

6.1.3 Social attitudes

In the third category, denominated *Social attitudes*, critical incidents but also interchange incidents have been grouped into four subcategories (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9 – Types of challenging situations grouped under the Social attitudes category



Source: The figure is generated with MAXQDA using the hierarchical code-subcode model function.

The most frequent situation concerns *ethnic and religious stereotypes and prejudices* (7). Here is an example described by an Angolan nun.

“The episode I am narrating happened at a catechism meeting [...]. A boy, addressing me but in front of everyone so that the others could hear him, told me: ‘I don’t want to be with you in the group because you are a ‘coloured person’ and cannot speak Italian’. I personally did not have time to say a word while his companions reacted immediately reprimanding him for the words he said to me. Two girls, in particular, said to him: ‘A. you cannot say that word’. There was confusion in the whole group. [...] The catechist took A. with her because he was crying desperately and first tried to console him. I stayed with the rest of the group and did not know what to say, but at that moment the thing that came to my mind was to tell them about my family so I could get their attention” (13_AN_Rel).

The other codes of this category collect episodes that denote the tendency to evaluate specific social objects positively or negatively: *gender stereotypes (woman-man relationship, emancipation)*; *belonging/separation to/between ethnic groups* (3); *ethnic and religious stereotypes and prejudices* (7); and, a last aspect, coded as *sensitivity to the experience of migration* (4) (Fig. 9).

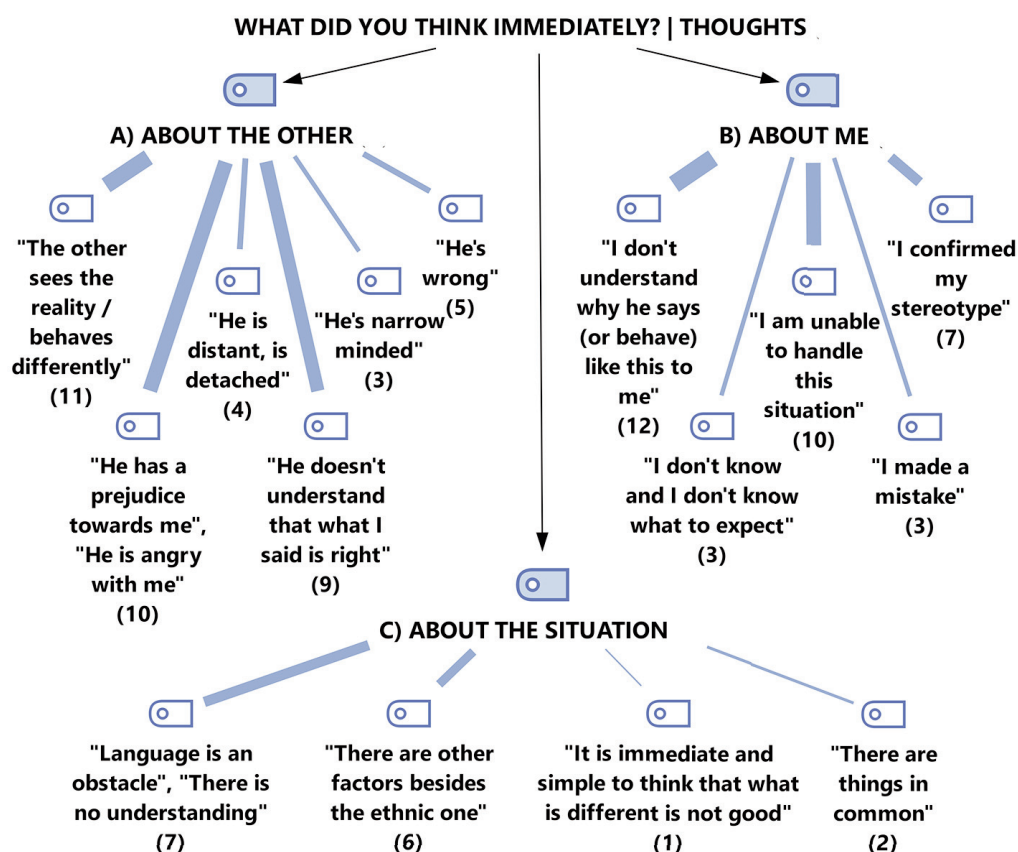
The work of classifying the narrated situations made it possible to identify some recurring situations in the educational contexts in which the research was carried out, which can be provided as examples to help trainers and trainees to identify, recognise and learn how to consciously handle those situations in which critical incidents could be generated. This collection may be continued and compared with the results of other completed and ongoing investigations³⁷.

6.2 Immediate thoughts

Participants were not limited to describing the difficult situation in detail, but were stimulated and guided to remember what they thought in the immediate, initial moment of the described episode. In relation to this aspect, 93 statements³⁸ concerning the cognitive component were coded as follows:

- thoughts 'about the other' (42), with 6 subcategories;
- thoughts 'about me' (35), with 5 subcategories;
- thoughts 'about the situation' (16), with 4 subcategories (Fig. 10).

Fig. 10 – Immediate thoughts into three categories



Source: The figure is generated with MAXQDA using the hierarchical code-subcode model function.

6.2.1 Thoughts 'about the other'

As can be seen in the figure, this first category collects a substantial number of codes compared to the other two. Almost half of the statements referring to immediate thoughts (42) refer to a thought 'about the other', i.e. to expressions in which who narrates detects and attributes to the other an intention or makes a judgement about him: *The other sees reality / behaves differently* (11); *He is distant, detached* (4); *He has a prejudice towards me / He is angry with me* (10); *He doesn't understand that what I said is right* (9); *He's wrong* (5); *He's narrow minded* (3) (Fig. 10).

In the immediate, diversity is perceived as a problem; there is an inability to consider other factors in the situation and the person is unable to decentralise. In many cases – when reading the narratives – it can be seen that the initial thought was then changed in the course of the narrated event, as shown in the following example. An Italian student narrates an episode that occurred on the last day of her stay in Ethiopia at the end of an international volunteering project.

"I explained to him that it was a cry of happiness and gratitude, but I don't think he understood. He made no sign of understanding and his attitude remained cold and detached. At that moment I felt embarrassed but above all annoyed. In fact, at first, I thought the uncle was insensitive and could not understand how touched I was by that moment" (72_IT_Lai).

In this case, the student – reflecting on the episode with the help of colleagues – later claims to have judged without knowing; in other cases, the person remained firm on her initial position. Below is an episode of misunderstanding experienced by the catechist with the mother of a child in her group, already mentioned. The Haitian nun, who carries out her service in a parish in Rome, was surprised when she saw that the mother not only did not call the child back, but rather embraced him and immediately activated a thought about the mother:

"For me it is wrong to react like this in the face of this boy's behaviour" (24_HA_Rel).

Choosing to narrate this episode as an example of a challenging situation experienced in a multicultural context, the woman religious seems to attribute this diversity to a different way of approaching respect for rules that she links to ethnic factors – but this interpretation is beyond the scope of the narrative. The expression used is, in fact, *'For me it is wrong...'* and not *'For my culture...'*.

6.2.2 Thoughts 'about me'

The second subcategory groups the codes here referred to as *thoughts 'about me'*. There are 35 expressions in which the narrator turns her thoughts and an introspective gaze first on herself than on the other, reflects on her own experience, becomes aware of what she is experiencing and searches within herself for the source of misunderstanding and error. There are five subcategories:

I don't know and I don't know what to expect (3); I don't understand why he says me (or behaves) like this to me (12); I am unable to handle this situation (10); I made a mistake (3); I have confirmed my stereotype (7) (Fig. 10).

An example is as follows: a woman religious tells of having had a recall whose meaning she did not understand.

"One evening, at assessment time, we were all sitting on the floor in a circle. I sat quietly holding my legs to my chest. A Samoan sister approached me and told me to sit properly. At that moment I was bewildered, I did not understand why she was telling me as follows. At the same time I felt humiliated (even though she said it to me in a whisper). I thought about my way of sitting and I did not find anything improper, on the contrary it seemed to me a polite and respectful way" (56_MY_Rel).

The initial difficulty of accepting the recall and understanding the reasons for it emerges in three narratives, but this is the only incident in which the narrator immediately turns her thoughts to herself. She feels humiliated, but does not feel anger and suffering towards the other. The incident, unlike the other two, has a positive epilogue.

6.2.3 Thoughts ‘about the situation’

The third category groups consist of four subcategories, in which 16 codings are gathered, referring to immediate thoughts that suggest a more attentive reading of the complexity ‘of the situation’ and from the outset aware of the factors that come into play. If one looks at the numbers, there are few (only 20%) who say that they were aware from the very first moment that in the situation perceived as challenging various factors come into play in addition to the ethnic one (6), including that of the lack of knowledge of the language (7); who are able to recognise from the outset that they were tempted to think with distrust of the different from themselves (1); who immediately turn their thoughts to the search for aspects in common (2) (Fig. 10). I propose two examples. The first refers to the awareness that there may be other triggering factors besides ethnicity in the observed situation.

“I don’t know whether the issue may have been generated by cultural factors or whether there was already a past between the two women, but it seemed to me that there was prejudice on both sides” (1_IT_Lai).

The second example gives a consideration that the narrator developed while reflecting on the incident and her immediate thoughts and describes the conclusion she came to.

“I have considered that when we see something different from our point of view, it is immediate and easy to think that it is not good. But I have learnt that we have to wait and question to understand and have the disposition to learn and decentralise to grasp those different cultural aspects that can help us enrich our knowledge and understanding of the human conduct of others” (7_VT_Rel).

In comparison with the hypothesis – on the basis of the analysis carried out – it can be seen that, in the challenging situations narrated by the 75 participants, the tendency to formulate thoughts that immediately focus on diversity as a ‘problem’ and the propensity to attribute the causes of the ‘problem’ to the other (39) are more recurrent in the immediate thoughts prevailing over the ability to suspend judgement and stop and reflect on oneself (35) and the situation (16) in order to identify other factors in addition to the ethnic one.

This result highlights the need and usefulness of helping trainees to reflect on their thinking cycle, to turn their thoughts on themselves and other factors (as well as the other) and to become aware of how immediate thoughts are interconnected with emotions and actions.

6.3 Emotions

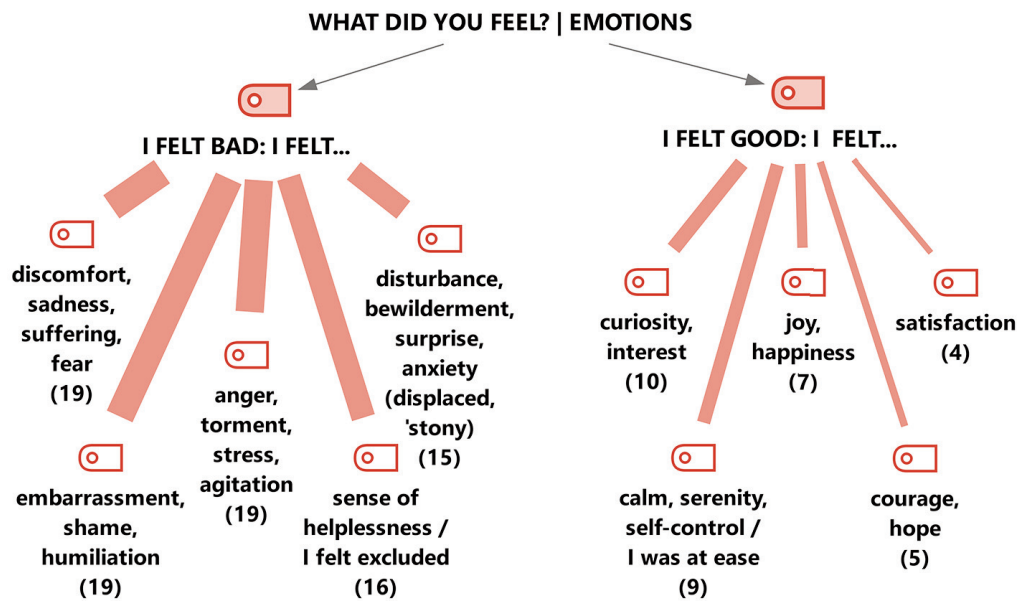
Expressions referring to emotions were identified 148 times in the narratives and were organised into two categories:

- *I felt bad* (111), with 8 subcategories,
- *I felt good* (37), with 7 subcategories (Fig. 11).

Comparing the numbers, the “weight” of emotions referring to states of unease (75%) is immediately apparent. In fact, the participants chose to narrate mainly problematic critical incidents despite the fact that they had been asked to refer both to challenging incidents experienced as an enriching interchange and to events experienced as adverse and problematic.

* In the figure, the five subcategories with the highest frequencies in each category have been selected.

Fig. 11 – Emotions into two categories*



Source: The figure is generated with MAXQDA using the hierarchical code-subcode model function.

6.3.1 I felt bad

There are 111 expressions grouped in the category *I felt bad*, i.e. 75% of the macro-category *Emotions*. In 66 (out of 75) narratives the participants report having felt bad at one or more moments of the narrated incident, i.e. they remember having felt, especially at the beginning of the episode, one or more emotions or moods of discomfort. The five subcategories illustrated in Figure 12 group together 78% of the expressions of discomfort detected: *discomfort, sadness, suffering, fear* (19); *anger, annoyance, torment, stress, agitation* (19); *embarrassment, shame, humiliation* (19); *sense of helplessness and exclusion* (16); *disturbance, bewilderment, surprise, anxiety (feeling displaced, 'stunned')* (15). The remaining codings, which are not represented in the figure because they are less frequent than the previous ones, refer to other states of mind such as feeling *others' prejudice against one's self* (7) and feeling *observed, strange, misunderstood, criticised, mocked* (8) or *discouraged, disheartened, challenged, exhausted* (8).

There are therefore numerous examples that could be given, but I will limit myself to two. In the first, an Italian student recalls the emotions she experienced following an incident at university with a fellow student an African country. One aspect that is evident in this narrative, as in others, is the need to allow time to pass.

"I tried at first to have a dialogue with my colleague, but she preferred to leave, at that moment I got down, and [I felt] impatient and angry, because we had not clarified the situation. In the days that followed, she and I were distant and did not make eye contact. It had been three weeks since the incident happened, I remember as if it was yesterday that my colleague approached me and in that instant we had a dialogue and eventually we embraced" (57_IT_Lai).

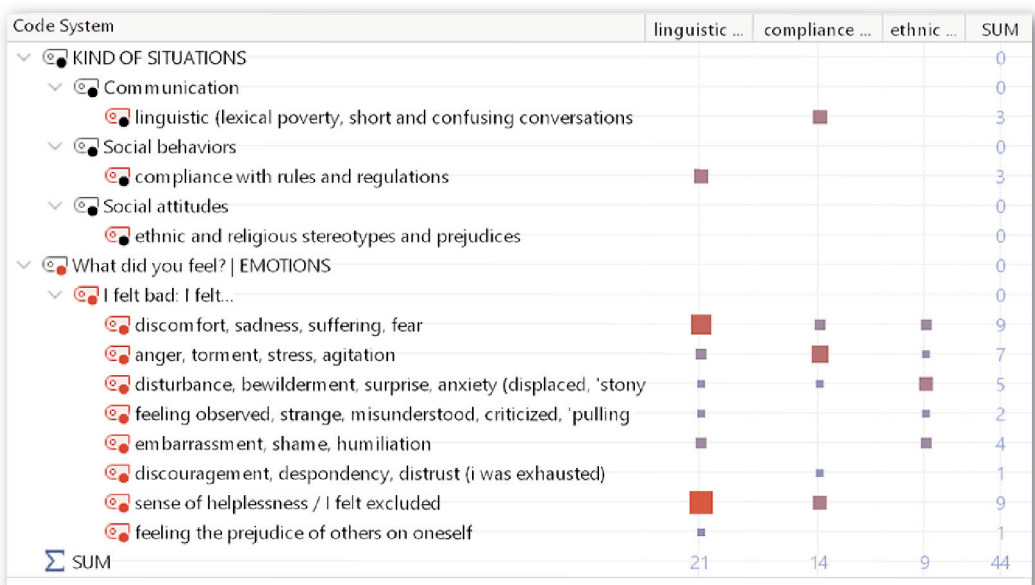
The second example concerns an episode that occurred in a mission context. A Congolese nun narrates a critical incident that occurred between her and a young Italian volunteer who was serving in the educational work she was coordinating, and highlights a sense of helplessness that she experienced in not being able to understand the reason for the girl's suffering.

“[...] when sisters came to ask me what the problem was with this girl’s behaviour, then I asked myself: What did I say? Why did she get angry with me? At that moment I thought back to the times we had spent together to find the reason for her suffering, but nothing came to mind” (35_CO_Rel).

Again, as in the previous case, after some time, through dialogue the situation evolves into a mutually enriching interchange.

Looking at the relationship between the codes assigned to emotions and those assigned to challenging situations, I highlight other considerations. For example, by cross-referencing the most recurrent types of situations (7 or more frequencies) and the states of mind of discomfort, one notices that the difficulty of communicating verbally (which, as I have already pointed out, is also combined in some cases with respect for rules and norms) is connected with almost all the emotions in the ‘I felt bad’ category and in particular with a *sense of helplessness and exclusion, discomfort, sadness, suffering, fear* (Fig. 12).

Fig. 12 – Relationships between codes with multiple frequencies (categories ‘Situations’ and ‘Emotions-discomfort’)

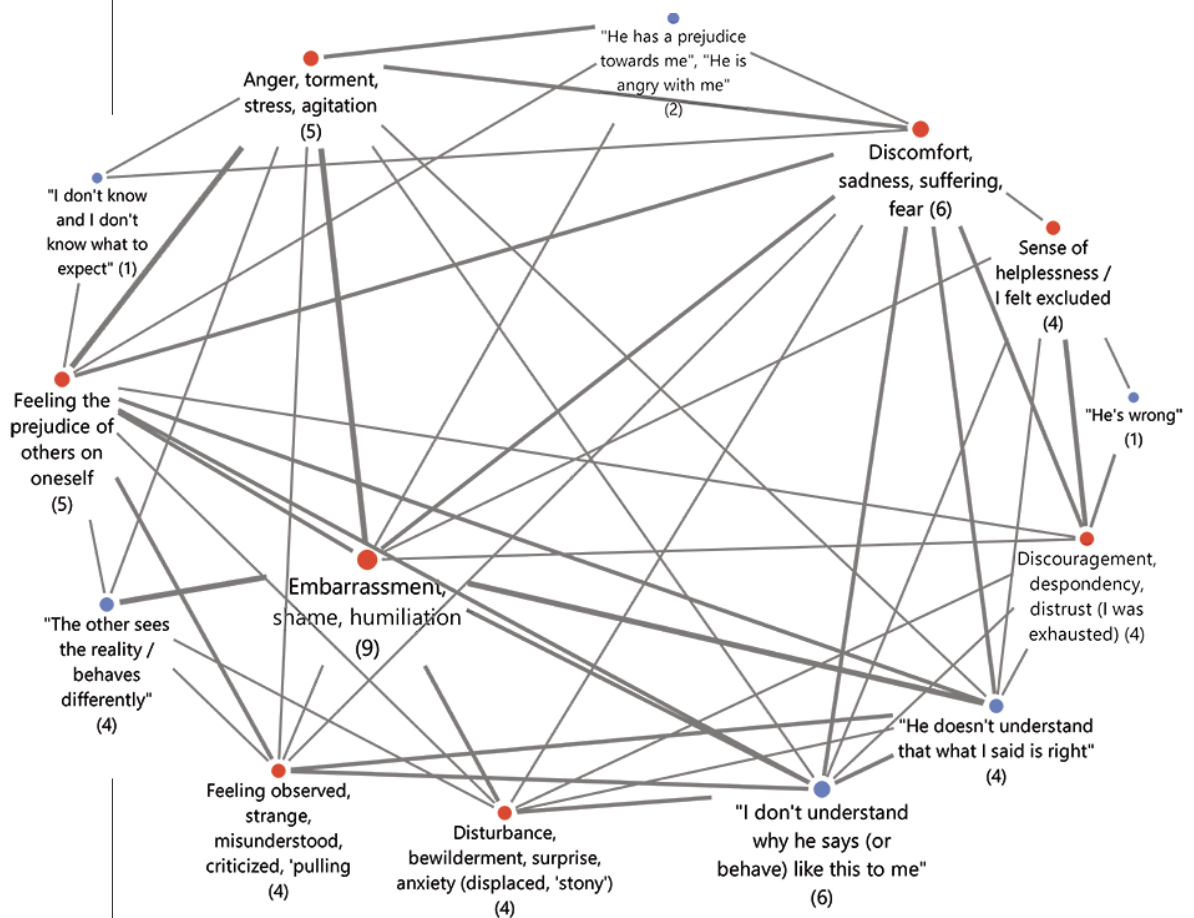


Source: The figure is generated using MAXQDA software with the code relationship exploration tool.

Continuing to explore the correlations – in particular those between emotions and thoughts – it is interesting to see the map depicting the relationships between emotions that generate states of discomfort and immediate thoughts. As can be seen in Figure 14, the emotions generating unpleasantness are mainly related to the subcategory named the *thoughts about the other* and in only one case with *thoughts about me* (*I do not understand why he says or behaves as follows*) (Fig. 13).

The mood of embarrassment, shame and humiliation is connected to other moods of discomfort such as *anger, torment, stigma, discomfort, fear, sadness, feeling misunderstood, displaced, in pain, powerless, excluded*. These emotions are linked to thoughts that emphasise non-knowledge and non-understanding, the realisation of the diversity of the other, interpretations or judgements about the other. These are situations in which the immediate thought is not about the other but is directed at oneself and the situation is more closely related to emotions that appear less intense such as, embarrassment or surprise and to states of well-being such as calm, curiosity, courage.

Fig. 13 – Map of the codes of relationships between Emotions-Discomfort and Thoughts



Source: The figure is generated with MAXQDA using the Code Map function.

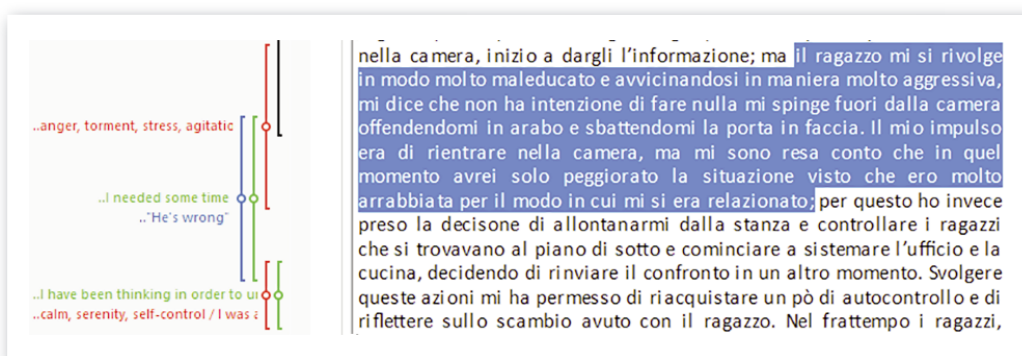
"I looked at them and caught in their eyes the emotion they were feeling at that moment, which was one of discomfort and disapproval. And I wondered what specifically had not seemed right to them on my part. I felt uncomfortable and almost embarrassed but then I realised that I had to be the one to clarify what had just happened" (26_IT_Lai).

6.3.2 I felt good

In 25% of the cases (37 expressions), the participants report having experienced emotions that made them feel good: *curiosity and interest* (10), *courage and hope* (5), *joy and happiness* (7), *calmness, serenity, self-control, being at ease* (9), *satisfaction* (4), (Fig. 11). The two remaining codings, which are not represented in the figure, refer to *astonishment and surprise (in a positive sense)* (1) and *gratitude* (1).

In many narratives the 'feeling good' is found after an initial phase in which emotions that generate a state of unease predominate: it takes time, patience, reflection and dialogue to allow the situation to evolve and a state of well-being to take over. An example of this transition from states of discomfort to states of well-being is provided in Figure 15 in which the expressions and their respective codes assigned in MAXQDA are shown. The Italian student narrating a challenging event she experienced with an Egyptian boy in a foster home, describes in a few lines her initial altered emotional state, then her choice to move away in order to manage her irritation. Finally, she admits to having regained calm and self-control (Fig. 14).

Fig. 14 – A coding example



Source: The image shows codes created with MAXQDA on the document 47_IT_Lai.

In another episode narrated by an Italian student, curiosity and interest and a state of well-being shine through from the very beginning of the narrative. A course colleague from India, before leaving for her country, gives her a gift: a cloth. Thinking back on her emotions, the student writes as follows:

"If I was curious before, when she explained to me in detail how it is used in her country, I felt joy because I realised the great value of the gift that had just been given to me. Of course, if she had not explained to me the importance she and her culture give to this type of cloth, I would have simply seen a beautiful centrepiece. In fact, I think it was her introduction and explanation of the gift that was crucial for me to fully embrace it" (40_IT_Lai).

This last example is the only case that refers to an interchange situation that does not present, as in other cases, an initial problematic experience.

In conclusion, the net result obtained through the analysis of the narratives (75% of the coding on emotions and states of discomfort and only 25% on emotions and states of well-being) – which certainly stemmed from the choice to narrate mainly critical problematic incidents – deserves attention and highlights the need to promote the ability to recognise and manage one's emotions and to become aware of the interconnection or interpenetration between emotions, thoughts and actions. It is a challenge that calls on educational contexts to pay attention and utmost care to this aspect. The decision to implement pathways and strategies that help promote the ability to recognise and manage emotions could help people avoid investing/wasting energy, time and resources in having to manage states of discomfort that may arise from misunderstanding, lack of knowledge or superficiality of assessment or from different ways of expressing and manifesting emotions.

6.4 Actions

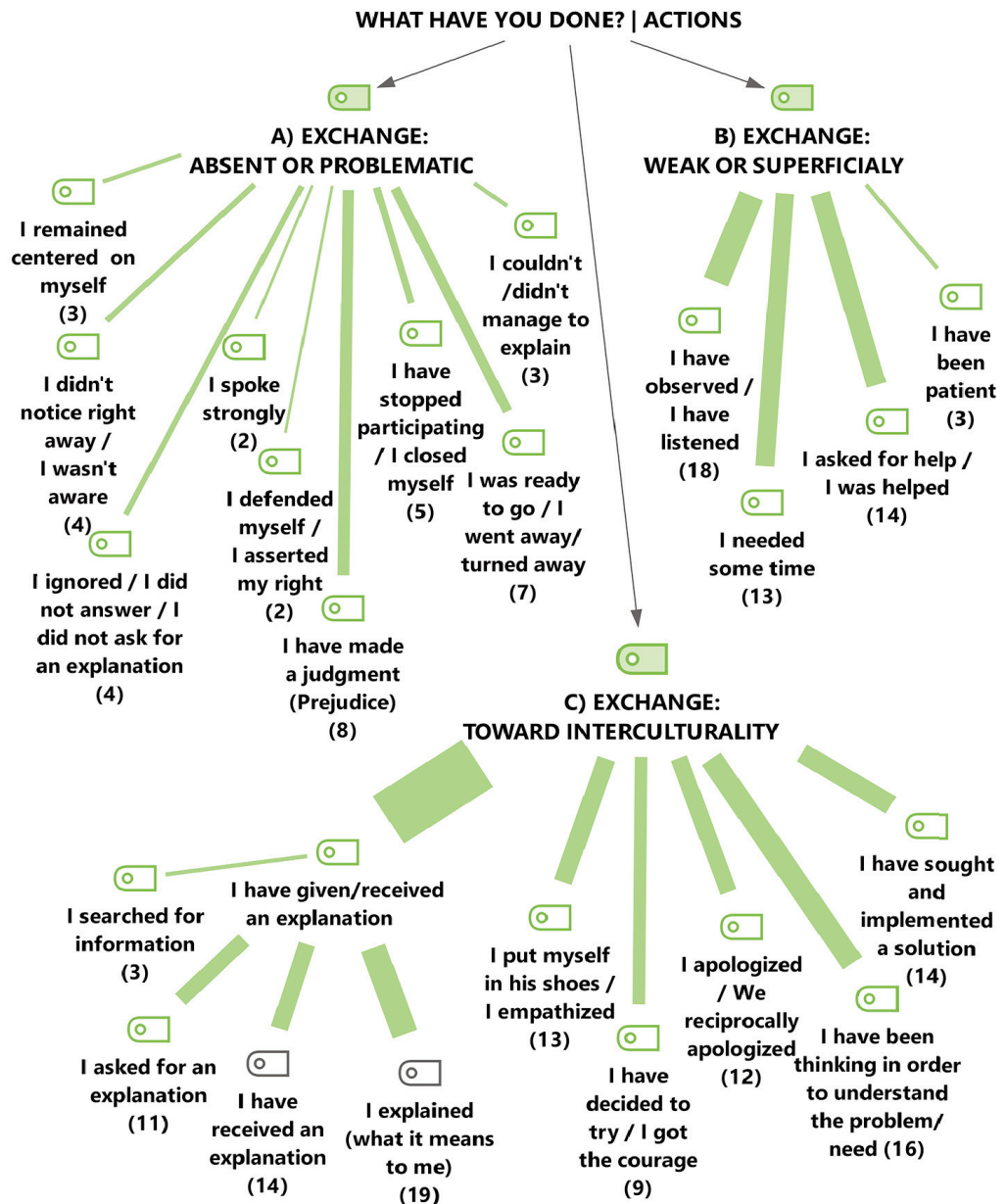
The analysis of the expressions concerning the narrator's behaviour in the course of the incident made it possible to identify 197 statements which – on the basis of the general hypothesis that guided the research – were grouped into three subcategories of *Interchange* as follows:

- *absent or problematic* (38), with 9 subcategories;
- *weak or superficial* (48), with 4 subcategories;
- *towards interculturality* (111), with 5 subcategories (including one with 4 other sub-codes) (Fig. 15).

Again, as already noted in the analysis of emotions, in the 75 narratives the majority of participants indicated several actions. Some of them refer to the immediate behaviour enacted in the first stage of the incident and in many cases indicate an initial difficulty or closure, which, however, is overcome later on through the decision to 'take time' for reflection, observation, listening, dialogue and the search for explanations.

In the coding phase, it was decided to consider all the actions as it was not possible to distinguish between those in the trigger phase of the event, those implemented during and those at the end (Fig. 15).

Fig. 15 – Actions into three categories

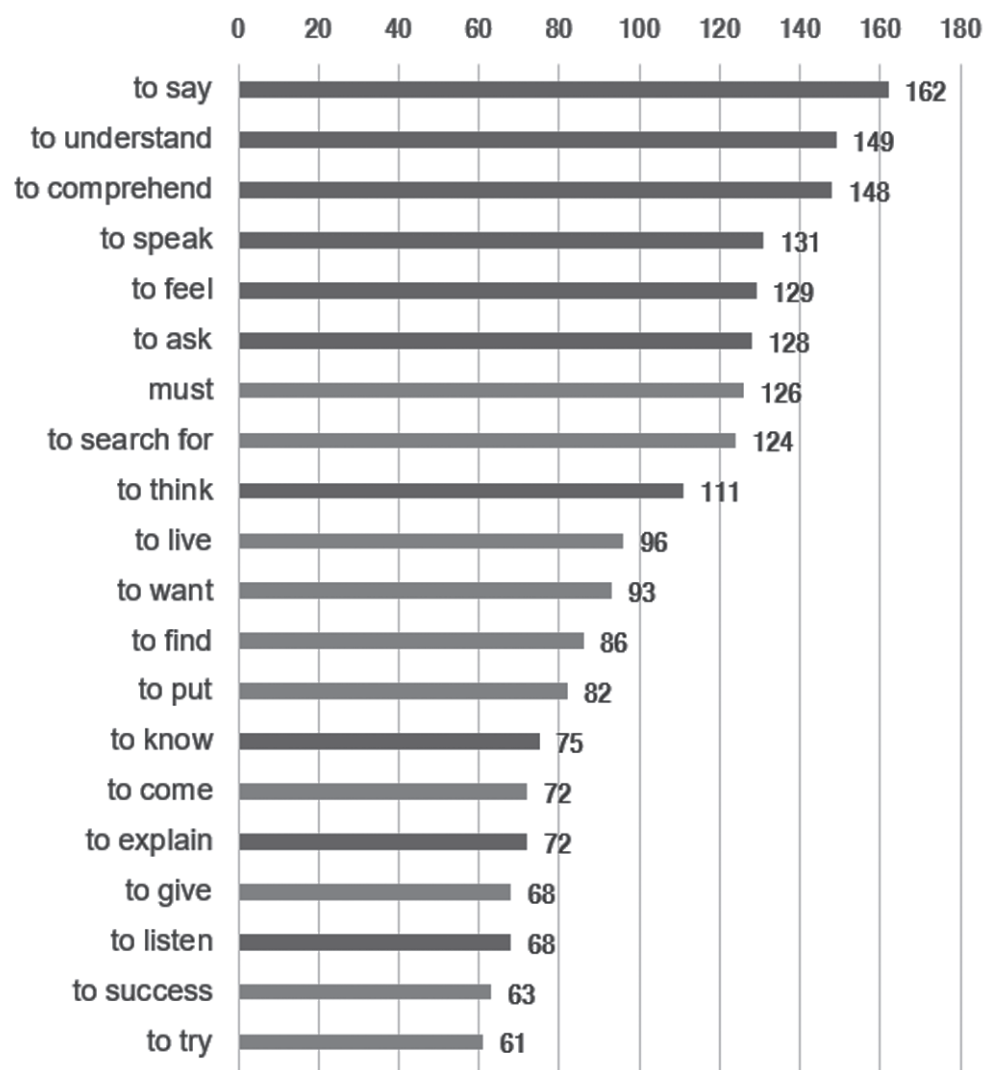


Source: The figure is generated with MAXQDA using the hierarchical code-subcode model function.

In many narratives, there is an evolution *from* actions that indicate an inability to enter into a relationship *to* others that support the choice to seek an exchange in a conscious and intentional way. If one looks at Fig. 15 as a whole, it is immediately evident the substantial number of actions coded with the label *I gave/received*, an ex-

planation that highlights the need to know, understand and comprehend. This action lies in many cases between two types of action: after an initial refusal or closure, the decision *to explain/explain oneself* allows the person to decentralise, to understand, to tell, to apologise. In relation to this aspect, before describing each category with its respective subcategories, it is useful to introduce a consideration that transpires from an analysis carried out with an analysis tool that has different characteristics from MAXQDA, the *IramuteQ*³⁹ software that was used for a statistical analysis on the textual corpus of the 75 narratives, formed by the 44,384 occurrences⁴⁰. The analysis served to identify the frequencies of the headwords and also to explore certain relationships. An initial result can be seen in Figure 17 in which only the 20 most recurrent verbs in the entire corpus are listed, to which the verb 'to do' with 348 frequencies is added in first place in the order⁴¹.

Graph. 2 – First 20 verbs in descending order (excluding the verb 'to do'=348)



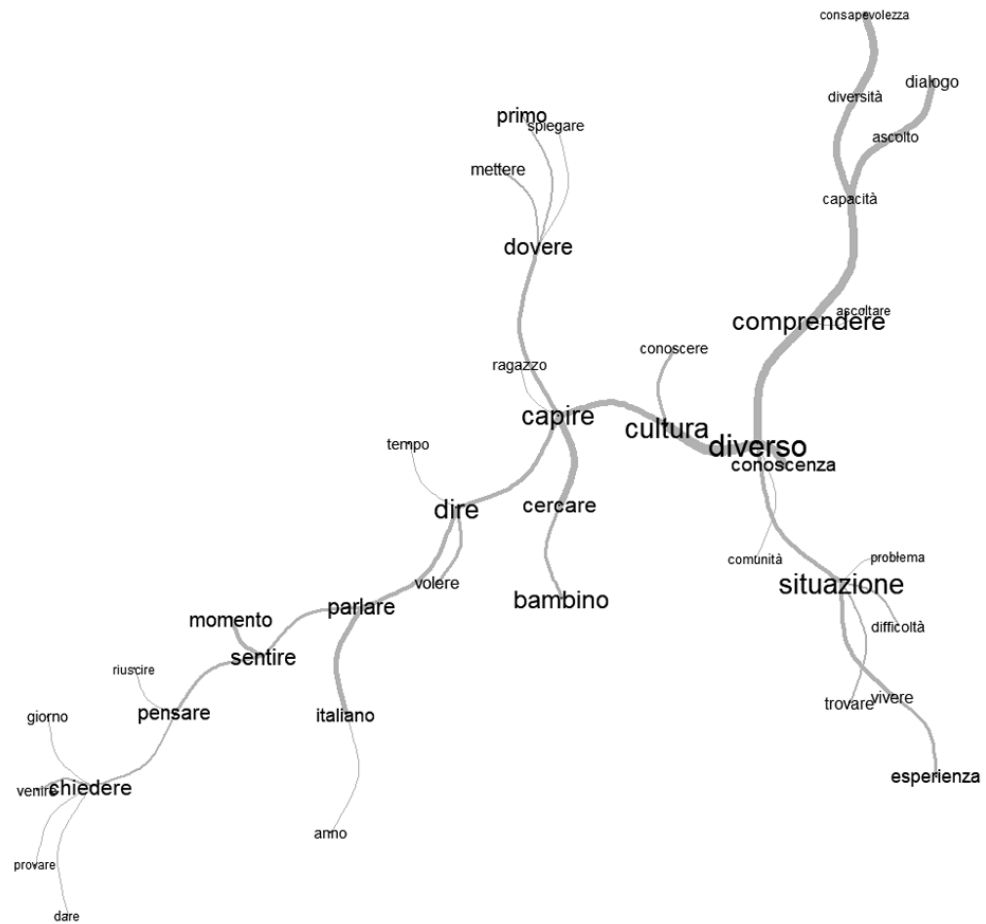
Source: The graph is generated with IramuteQ

The most recurrent verbs indicate going towards the other (*to say, to speak, to ask, to explain, to know, to listen*), the need to interpret (*to know, to understand, to feel, to search for, to think*) and to experience (*to live, to want*).

The analysis of the co-occurrences graph of all the lemmas in the corpus makes it possible to better grasp the context in which the actions represented by the most

recurring verbs are placed, those linked to acting through understanding/comprehending/searching for/knowing the culture/the different with a movement that goes towards the other through communicating (saying/speaking, but also feeling, thinking, asking) (Graph. 3).

Graph. 3 – Co-occurrence graph of corpus lemmas



Source: The graph was created by selecting up to 70 occurrences (excluding the lemma 'to do').

The exploration with *IramuteQ* through the analysis of the most recurring verbs provides an initial, more general approach to the analysis of actions, which will be better clarified in the following points in which I will analyse the result of the encodings resulting from the analysis conducted with MAXQDA.

6.4.1 Absent or problematic interchange

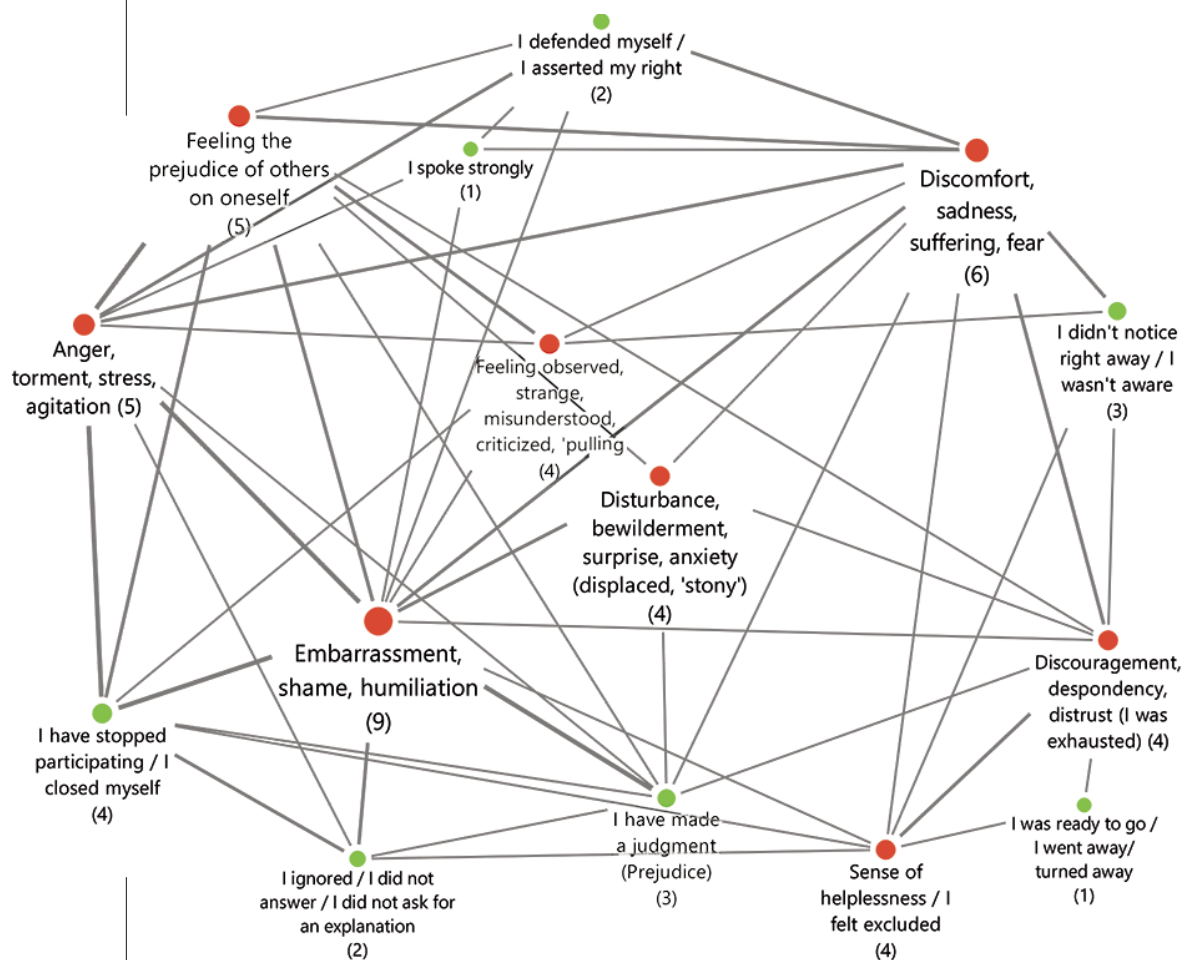
The first subcategory, *Interchange: absent or problematic* contains 38 actions (19% of the total) which were grouped into the following 9 subcategories: *I remained centred on myself* (3); *I made a judgement/Prejudice* (8); *I defended myself/I asserted my right* (2); *I spoke strongly* (2); *I was ready to go/I went away/I turned away* (7); *I ignored/I did not respond/I did not ask for an explanation* (4); *I stopped participating/I shut down* (5); *I did not notice right away/I was not aware* (4); *I couldn't/I didn't manage to explain* (3).

An example is provided by a student who works as an educator in a residential community for minors. She describes a tense situation between her and an Egyptian teenager in which she says she chose to walk away and admits that she 'needed time' to manage her emotions before intervening.

“My impulse was to go back into the room, but I realised that at that moment I would only make the situation worse as I was very angry at the way he had related to me, so I instead made the decision to leave the room and check on the guys downstairs and start tidying up the office and the kitchen, deciding to postpone the confrontation until another time” (47_IT_Lai).

The analysis of the correlations between emotions or moods of discomfort and actions of the subcategory *Interchange* ‘absent or problematic’ highlights two aspects. On the one hand, there is a relationship between closing and blocking behaviour – *I stopped participating/I closed myself off, I was ready to go/I went away/I turned away; I ignored/I did not answer/I did not ask for an explanation, I did not notice at once/I was not aware* – and emotions such as embarrassment, shame, humiliation, a sense of helplessness, discouragement and distrust. On the other hand, there is a connection between moods of discomfort and defensive and oppositional reactions – *I defended myself/I asserted my right, I spoke strongly, I made a judgement/Prejudice* (Fig. 16).

Fig. 16 – Code map: correlations between ‘Unease Emotions’ and Actions – Absent or problematic interchange



Source: The figure is generated by the MAXQDA software with the *Code Map* function.

In the narrative of a Congolese woman religiously confronted with the contempt expressed by some ‘non-African’ sisters for a food she had cooked, the relationship between strong emotions (“*Taken by anger and feeling sorry*”) and actions (“*Immediately after dinner I went to my room, I did not participate in the recreation which is obliga-*”)

tory for us”) is evident. Walking away, stopping participating and needing time to change one’s mind are linked in this incident (and also in others, as can be seen by looking at the dots and lines on the left-hand side of Figure 16), to ‘feeling the prejudice of others on oneself’. In this case, the incident is resolved only after the intervention and mediation of an external person.

“The next day the superior, realising I was angry, asked me to tell her what had happened. I explained and let her know my decision not to cook any more. The following week I did not go to the kitchen and continued so until the General Mother and the superior persuaded me and, at a community meeting, emphasised the subject of diversity. Since then I have changed my mind” (21_CO_Rel).

Another example – taken from a narrative already quoted – refers to an incident at a party where a confrontation was lacking and a simple gesture triggered sadness and anger. A woman religious narrates her reaction and state of mind of discomfort in response to a reaction of disappointment she perceived from a sister for expressing her joy with a form of vocal sound, between singing and howling, as is the custom in some African countries.

“I was hurt and immediately felt that we were being judged. [...] I felt sadness and anger inside realising that people did not know about different cultures. In response, I reminded the person concerned that we live in an international community so all cultures have the right to express themselves” (69_CO_Rel).

Starting from this last expression in which the narrator claims the right to expression, one can make a twofold reflection. On the one hand, in fact, it is necessary to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to express their own diversity, but on the other hand one sees the risk of opposing, of absolutizing aspects of one’s own traditions by claiming one’s own space and one’s own ‘turn’, as Santerini acknowledges by noting the emergence of new temptations of ‘colonialism’ in internal relations in contexts such as that of international Institutes of Consecrated Life⁴².

In fact, the response she claims to have given seems to close rather than open dialogue, and runs the risk of leaving no space and not creating the conditions that foster dialogue, interchange and the search for common ground.

6.4.2 Weak or superficial interchange

The remaining 80% of codified actions refer to an interchange that can be placed on a continuum from a weak and superficial level of intercultural experience to a more mature and conscious one.

The actions that have been grouped in the subcategory ‘*Interchange: weak or superficial*’ are 48, equal to 25% of the total of the codings: they range from taking and giving the other person time – *I needed some time* (13), *I have been patient* (3) – to reflection that requires observation and listening – *I have observed/I have listened* (18) – to the recognition of needing the help of others – *I asked for help/I was helped* (14).

I will give an example of this last aspect: a young woman religious from northern India, noticing the tension present in her community between two subgroups of novices belonging to two ethnic groups who live in a situation of open conflict there, turns to the educator not knowing what to do.

“I made some gestures and talked to another group in order not to bring external problems into the community, but I felt unable to mediate. Therefore, I confronted the educator in secret to solve this problem. I told her how I lived the sit-

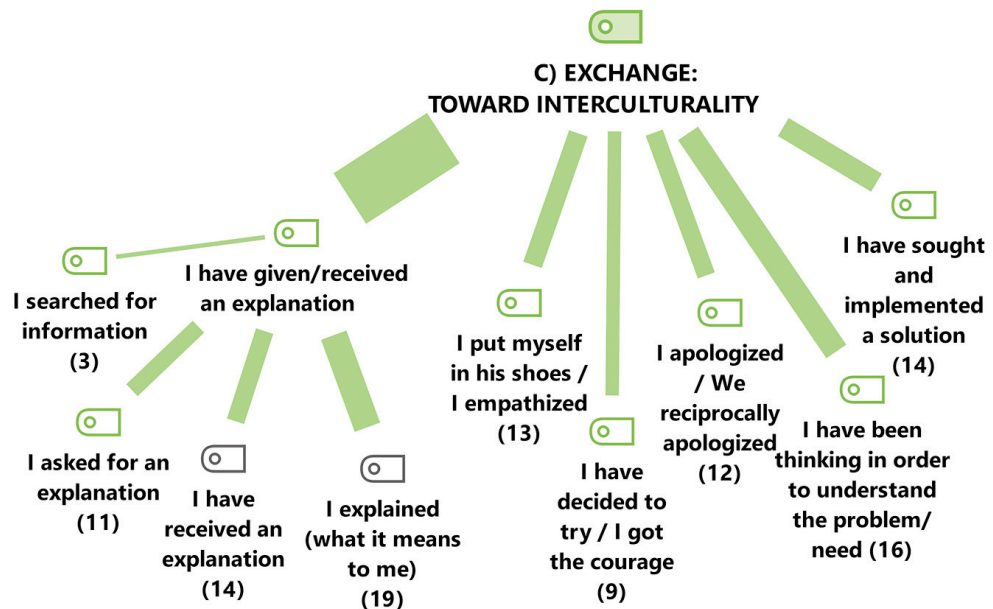
uation we were experiencing between us that she had not realised. I told her my feelings, that is, how I felt. I explained to her that I felt bad seeing young people preparing to enter religious life behaving like that in the community. Then I asked her to be attentive and to help them. The educator was not aware of the situation we were experiencing in the area and the repercussions in the community, and she thanked me for having the courage to share this with her. Afterwards, there was a dialogue between the educator and those who were involved in this situation. I observed that the situation improved day by day, the educator met the girls personally, dialogued with the group and slowly the situation became positive and normal. After that it was easier because even outside in the society the conflict was lessened” (70_IN_Rel).

In this case, the narrator apparently does not play an active role in the situation, but nevertheless performs a mediation that enables the others to deal with the problem.

6.4.3 Interchange towards interculturality

In the third category, more than half of the codings were included. There are 111 (or 56% of the total) expressions coded as ‘Interchange: towards interculturality’ (Fig. 15). If one looks carefully at the third section – reproduced in the figure below – one immediately notices a consistent grouping around the subcategory called ‘I gave/received an explanation’, which contains 47 codings and is divided into four further sub-categories: I searched for information (3); I asked for an explanation (11); I have received an explanation (14); I explained (what it means to me) (19) (Fig. 17).

Fig. 17 – The third subcategory of the category ‘Actions’



Source: The figure is generated with MAXQDA using the hierarchical code-subcode model function.

The action of explaining or seeking/receiving explanations recurs frequently in the narratives⁴³ and is enacted in order to know, interpret, understand. In many cases, the decision to explain oneself and to ask for explanations is decisive and leads to the alleviation of incomprehension, discomfort and unease. However, it is not always sufficient – as narrated by a Zambian missionary visiting a village in Tanzania after experiencing a way of welcoming very different from the one she was used to.

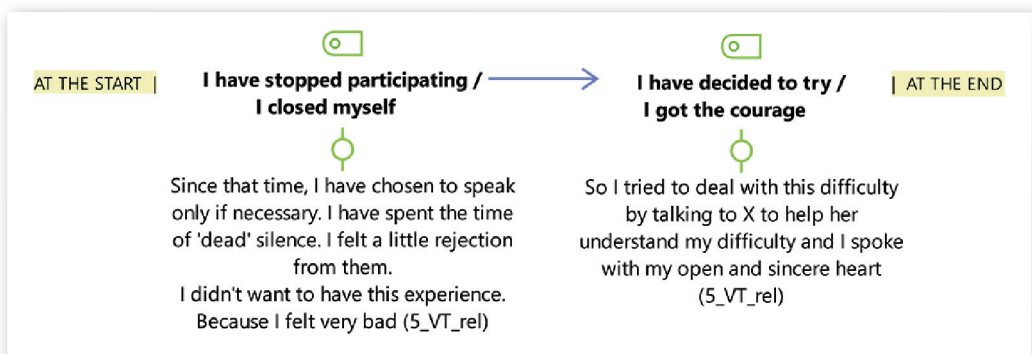
“Even after the explanation I still felt a little bad. Only after a few months, I began to understand and accept the Shangani culture” (37_Zambia_Rel).

The other actions coded in this third core already anticipate the specific competences for experiencing intercultural that I will analyse in the next section: decentralising (*I put myself in his shoes/I empathised*) which also implies reflecting on the problem and the needs of the other (*I have been thinking in order to understand the problem/need*); acknowledging to have made a mistake and apologising (*I apologized/We reciprocally apologized*); having courage and deciding to go towards the other and to find a solution together (*I have decided to try/I got the courage; I have sought and implemented a solution*). An example of the latter is narrated by an educator interacting with a Filipino mother who does not know Italian well.

“I asked myself what strategy should be put in place to accommodate the mother and stem the communication barrier. I listened not only with my ears but mainly with my heart. I read in the mother’s eyes several times a veil of embarrassment that I imagine she was trying to hide behind smiles. I started to speak very slowly, articulating the words well with the help of facial expressions. As the weeks went by, communication definitely improved although it was still not very fluid and fluent” (17_IT_Lai).

The following example describes well the evolution from a zero interchange in the initial phase of the narrative to a slow and gradual opening towards an interchange tending towards interculturality. A Vietnamese student narrates two different phases she experienced at the beginning and at the end of her internship experience in an Italian school (Fig. 18).

Fig. 18 – The third subcategory of the category ‘Actions’



Source: The figure is generated by the MAXQDA software with the map function.

The difficulties experienced are linked to the educator’s lack of knowledge and understanding of the Italian language and context. The initial attitude is one of closure, she feels rejected and in turn rejects the experience; the state of mind of unease grows and lasts for a certain time that the student describes as a ‘time of dead silence’. When she finds the courage to seek dialogue with an ‘open and sincere heart’ and to communicate to the class teacher what she was experiencing, a possibility of a solution is glimpsed. In this incident, one grasps the difficulty of entering into a process that must be sought and desired by both parties. Sometimes there is a need for one of the two parties to take the first step. The volitional and motivational aspect and the fostering of attitudes of openness and readiness to initiate an interchange is another dimension on which – from an educational point of view – attention must be paid, in the knowledge that there is still confusion about the concept of intercultural.

Nina Deliu, reporting the results of the qualitative analysis of the answers to the question of the first focus group on the perceived difference between multiculturalism and interculturality, acknowledges that in the participants' view the first concept seems to refer to "a clearer and more easily explained phenomenon, whereas interculturality requires more effort (and difficulty) in providing details and examples to reach the depth of the concept"⁴⁴. Multiculturalism is seen as a static phenomenon, seen as a starting point, while interculturality is understood as a point of arrival, but it is not as evident what is its "final realization and ultimate result this union, sharing and individual transformation leads to"⁴⁵.

The result of this analysis of the actions described in the narratives – while making clear the effort and tension towards an interchange tending towards interculturality – nevertheless attests to the fact that the experience of an interchange, involving reciprocal contamination and transformation, takes place through long and complex processes and implies the possession of specific and transversal competences.

6.5

Competences

The basic or transversal and specific intercultural competences that were listed by the participants in the narratives are more numerous than those that were coded in the analysis phase with MAXQDA and are the subject of presentation here. The criterion followed in the selection was to consider those that were concretely acted out in the storyline, i.e. the competences that were identifiable by the researcher in the development of the incident⁴⁶. This work was done by two researchers at different times; at the end, the results were discussed and compared in order to arrive at a single choice with the awareness that the narratives are the result of a reconstruction *a posteriori* on the basis of an interpretation made by the author, and the reader in turn also interprets and must be aware that these are always interpretations.

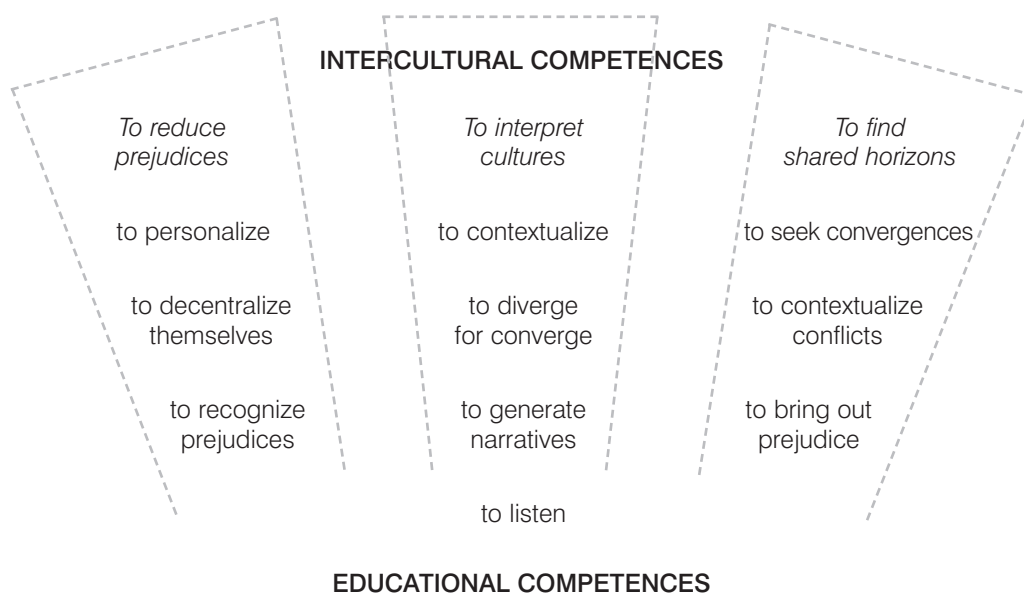
In the analysis of competences, the work of coding and creating the categories and subcategories was more laborious and complex than for the other macro-categories (situations, thoughts, emotions and actions) and required combining the two inductive (*bottom-up*) and deductive (*bottom-down*) approaches. It was necessary to deepen the theoretical framework on intercultural competences and to refer to other research in order to organise the coding and arrive at a convincing classification of the competences that emerged in the narratives. At the same time, what emerged in the analysis allowed for further clarification of certain aspects of the construct.

I recall some concepts I presented at the beginning of this contribution.

Fruitful interaction between people and/or groups of one or more cultures different from one's own requires both parties to put in place an articulated set or system of intercultural competences. *Basic intercultural competences* are a set of communication and interpersonal competences and the ability to deal with prejudice; *advanced competences* are the ability to interpret one's own and others' culture and the ability to find points of contact, common meanings and shared horizons.

After carrying out an analysis and initial classification and organisation of the competences acted out in the documents, the competences were then grouped into four categories, three of which were similar to those identified in the research conducted by Reggio and Santerini⁴⁷. The researchers from the University of Milan analysed the reports that dealt with situations that emerged in school educational practice and considered three groups of competences – *To reduce prejudices*; *To interpreting cultures*; *To find shared horizons* – and noted the presence of other relational and professional competences typical of educational work in general, including listening in particular. These resources were considered as "foundational competences for educational and didactic work"⁴⁸, as illustrated in Figure 19.

Fig. 19 – Model of the competences identified in the research by P. Reggio and M. Santerini



Source: Figure 7.1. *From educational competence to intercultural competence*, in REGGIO, *The Outcomes* 131.

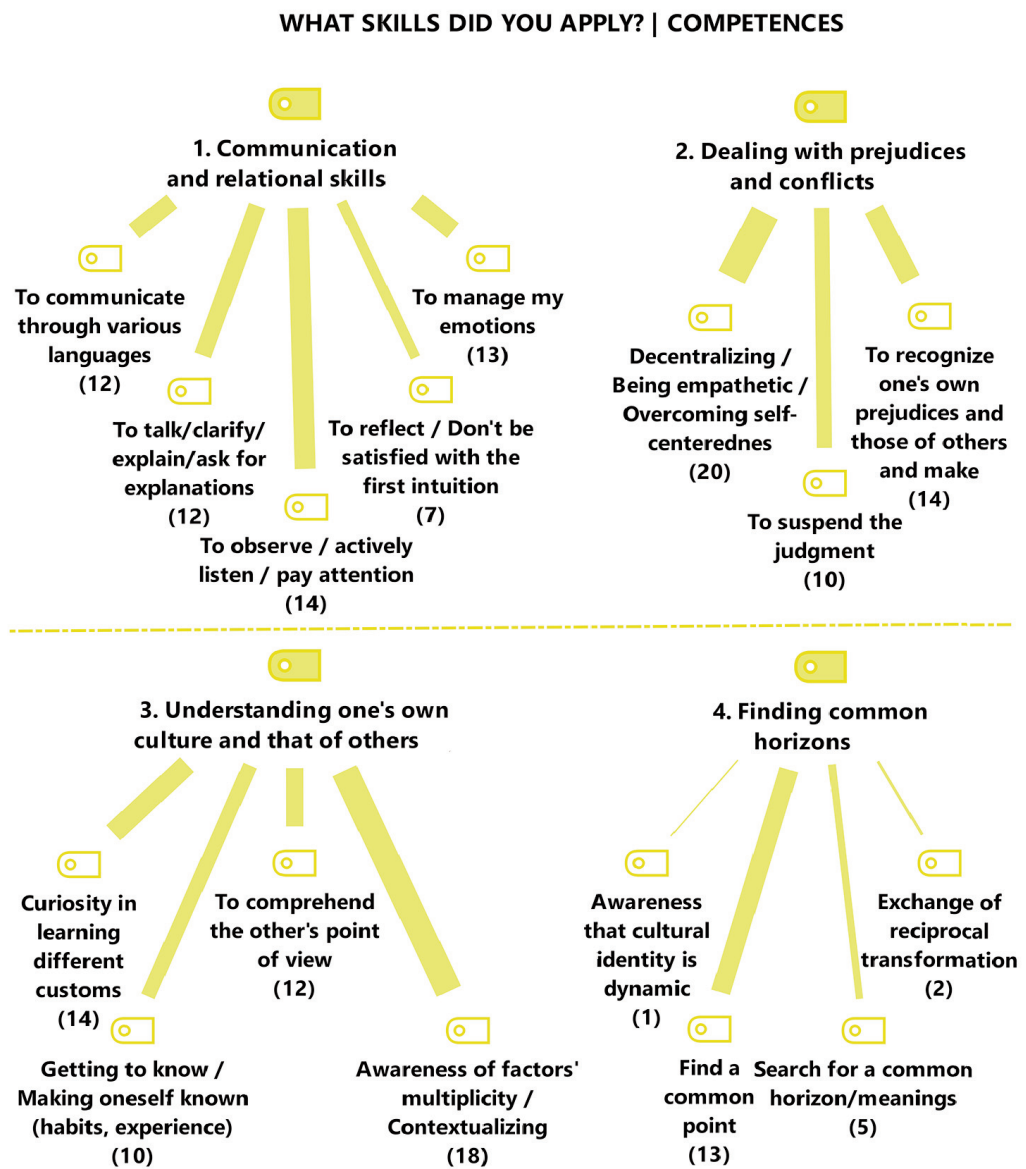
The comparison with the hypothesis and research results of the University of Milan was useful. As in the Milan University model, this survey identified some more general transversal or basic competences and three more specific competence groupings which are similar to those depicted in Figure 19, albeit with differences in the distribution of subcategories. There were 186 codings and they are grouped into the following four categories:

1. *communication and relational skills* (64), with 6 subcategories;
2. *dealing with prejudices and conflicts* (44), with 3 subcategories;
3. *interpreting one's own culture and that of others* (57), with 4 subcategories;
4. *finding common horizons* (21), with 5 subcategories (Fig. 20).

The first category includes competences that concern aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication, active listening, and management of emotions that are necessary in all types of interaction, not only in those that take place in multicultural contexts.

These aspects, as described in the following points, are closely linked and interconnected with more specific aspects that refer to intercultural competences. For example, the abilities to observe, to listen, to dialogue and to explain are linked and interconnected with the categories of competences considered more specific. These competences are indispensable resources and conditions for an interchange towards interculturality.

Fig. 20 – Competences into four categories



Source: The figure is generated by the MAXQDA software with the hierarchical code-subcode model function.

6.5.1 Basic communication and relational skills

Out of a total of 186 codings, the competences most frequently acted upon (64, 34% of the total) refer to *basic communication and interpersonal competences*, often indicated in combination with other more specific competences for the intercultural approach.

The coded competences are as follows: *To observe/Actively listen/Paying attention* (14); *To communicate through various languages* (12); *To talk/clarify/explain/ask for explanations* (12); *To manage my emotions* (13); *To reflect/Don't be satisfied with the first intuition* (7); *Problem solving* (6)⁴⁹.

I will give two examples that highlight an already obvious aspect: communicative competence is crucial for interchange. In the first episode, a volunteer takes stock of the competences she implemented in an encounter she had with a non-Italian boy aged 11-12 who was a guest in a residential community for minors.

“It was an experience in which I was able to apply skills such as listening, empathy, knowing how to manage my emotions in front of him, and a set of communication skills, although not in the way I would have liked. In fact, I could have better managed communication with him at that time by making him understand that I was close to him and that he could talk to me about everything” (9_IT_Lai).

The second example has already been reported for the category 'actions'. A student working at the nursery school narrates as follows the competence she implemented in interacting with a Filipino mother with little knowledge of Italian.

“I listened not only with my ears but mainly with my heart. I read in the mother’s eyes several times a veil of embarrassment that I imagine she was trying to hide behind smiles. I started to speak very slowly, articulating the words well with the help of facial expressions. As the weeks went by, communication definitely improved although it was still not very fluid and fluent” (17_IT_Lai).

In this category, in addition to communication competences, other resources are listed that refer to internal dispositions (attitudes, values). These resources attest to the need to put in place an indispensable condition: the disposition to invest energy in the relationship with others, i.e. not to pass over, to choose to devote time and energy to observing, listening, reflecting, not to stop on first intuition, to seek dialogue, to want to clarify, to give/seek/ask for information/explanations. All these skills are indispensable in order to manage prejudices and conflicts, to interpret and understand and, finally, to realise an effective interchange and to seek/find common horizons together.

6.5.2 Dealing with prejudices and conflicts

The second category, *Dealing with prejudices and conflicts*, has 44 codings and 3 subcategories: *Understanding one’s own and others’ prejudices and making them explicit* (14); *Decentralizing/Being empathic/Overcoming self-centredness* (20); *To suspend the judgement* (10) (Fig. 20).

There were 12 narratives in which a stereotype and/or prejudice was detected. Two cases narrated a real conflict experienced by the narrator with a person from another culture; in one of the two cases the conflict was not resolved, in the second the narrative-writing activity allowed the student to make the decision to clarify the situation years after the event.

Here are two examples. In the first, an Italian educator, reflecting on her own behaviour in an episode that occurred in the foster home (a disrespectful and violent reaction by an Albanian teenager whom she had called out for not respecting the rules), acknowledged that she had formulated an ethnic prejudice within herself (belonging to “a people of arrogant and rude people”) and that she needed time to manage her emotions and become aware that she had made a mistake and had not considered other personal and contextual factors.

“Initially I was caught by prejudice, but then in ‘cold blood’ I reflected and thought that there must have been a problem behind that behaviour, a need of the boy” (48_IT_Lai).

In the second, an Angolan woman religious narrates how she reacted to an ethnic prejudice expressed by a boy against her and how, with resilience, calmness, decentralisation and empathy, she helped the other to come out of the prejudice.

“And I also said to myself, maybe this boy was the first time he had seen an African person or it was the first time he had come into contact with a person

different from him and so he was frightened or maybe he was used to calling African people by the expression 'coloured' as some adults also call us. [...] I imagine that the boy experienced this event with surprise and astonishment because he had changed his attitude towards me, he was no longer distrustful but was curious, he wanted to know, understand, share and listen” (13_AN_Rel).

6.5.3 Interpreting one's own culture and that of others

The third and fourth subcategories group together the more specific competences denoting greater sensitivity to interculturality.

A reflection on the competence 'to be able to critically interpret cultures' has already been introduced in relation to what emerged in the analysis of the actions described in the narratives, in particular the action *explain yourself/to explain*.

If we consider that – as Paul Ricoeur states and Santerini reiterates – from a hermeneutic perspective oriented towards understanding the other “human action is in many respects a quasi-text”⁵⁰, it is illuminating to recall the reasoning of the French philosopher who suggests not to contrast 'explaining' and 'interpreting' as a function of understanding, but to see them as moments that are both necessary to proceed 'in the direction of meaning'⁵¹.

Knowing how to interpret and wanting to do so, concerns willingness, curiosity, interest in the other, taking action to get to know the other, seeking dialogue, obtaining/providing useful information to be able to interpret and, therefore, understand and comprehend the situation, the behaviour, the experience of the other and equipping oneself to help the other understand one's own.

The category *Interpreting one's own culture and that of others* has 57 codings (31% of the total) and four subcategories: *Getting to know/Making oneself known (habits, experience)* (10); *Curiosity in learning different customs* (14); *Awareness of factors' multiplicity/Contextualising* (18); *To comprehend the other's point of view* (12) (Fig. 20).

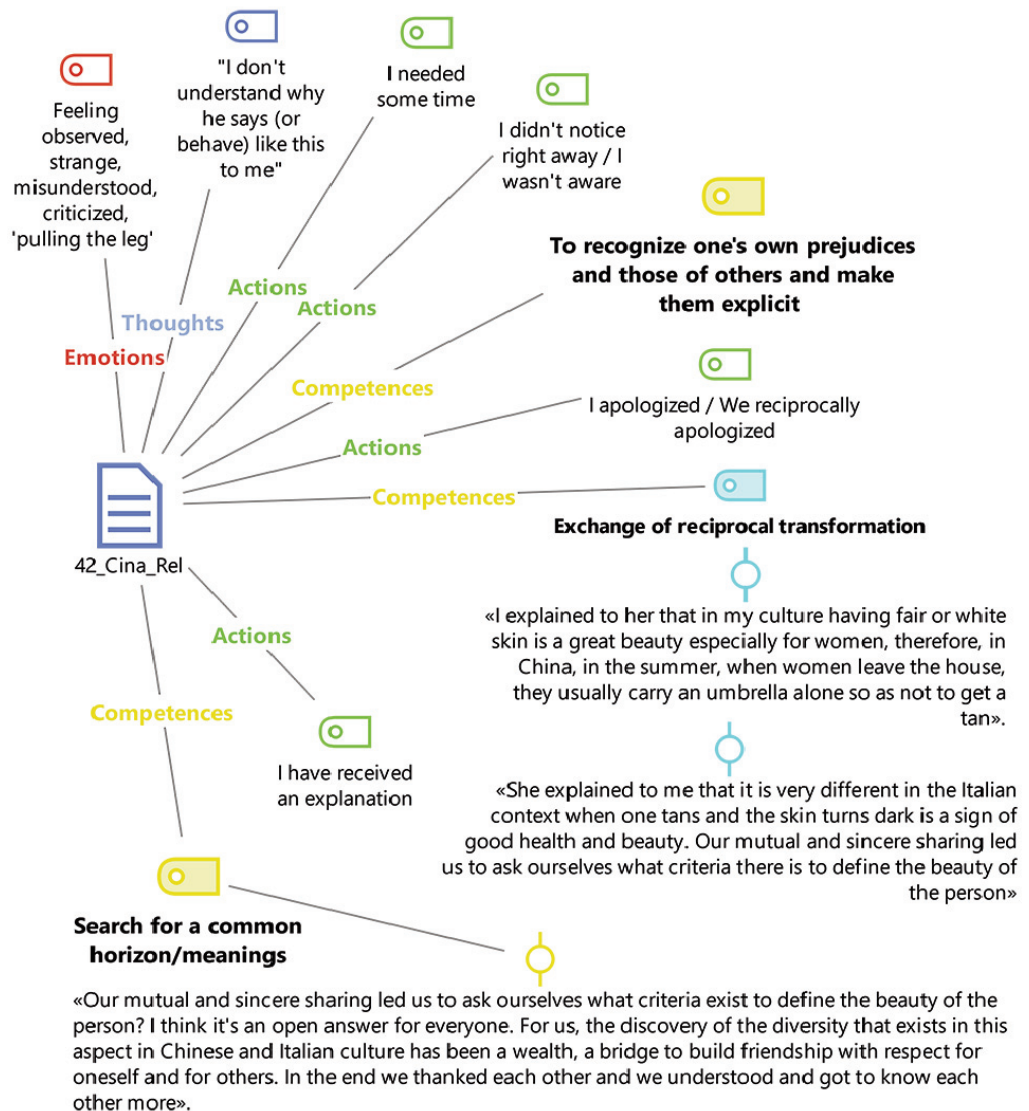
An example of an exchange of interpretations on a simple incident concerning the aspect of corporeality is narrated by a Chinese woman religious who relates an episode she experienced with an Italian sister.

“One day an Italian woman religious from my community told me that I had tanned. While talking to me she smiled, but I still felt mocked. I did not understand why she was doing this to me, I felt bad. In my culture you don't directly tell a person that they have dark skin, especially girls or young women, because all women like to have light or white skin, (not a disease-ridden white colour, of course), but being white for us is a great beauty for women. At that moment, I was hurt but I did not want to talk to her about it” (42_CI_Rel).

Being told: “You are tanned” arouses immediate unease in her, she remains centred on her own experience, on the customs learnt in her context that she knows (and which she tends to ethnicise: “In my culture”), but she does not close herself off completely, she takes time to get to know and understand. It is only after some time that, thanks to another event, she realises her misunderstanding, acknowledges that she was wrong, seeks a dialogue, explains her point of view and interpretation, and listens to the other's interpretation.

The passages of this narrative are depicted in Figure 21 which shows the coding system: three code segments can be read that refer to *the exchange of interpretations* and the search for common meanings that the student recognises she has put in place.

Fig. 21 – An Example of Interpretations Exchange



Source: The figure is generated by the MAXQDA software using the single-case model function with code segments.

6.5.4 Finding common horizons

In the narrative, the Chinese woman religious, although referring to an incident that may seem of little importance for the type of situation, clearly narrates the process of self-reflection and explicitly refers to three of the four categories of competences identified in this investigation. In fact, the first one can also be discerned in the narrative, although it is not made explicit. Also in the other narratives recording the competences coded in this category, the presence of several competences belonging also to one or more of the other categories can be detected.

The fourth and last category, *Finding common horizons*, was coded only 21 times (11% of the total) with the following subcategories: *Awareness that cultural identity is dynamic* (1); *Find a common point* (13); *Exchange of reciprocal transformation* (2); *Search for a common horizon/meanings* (5) (Fig. 20).

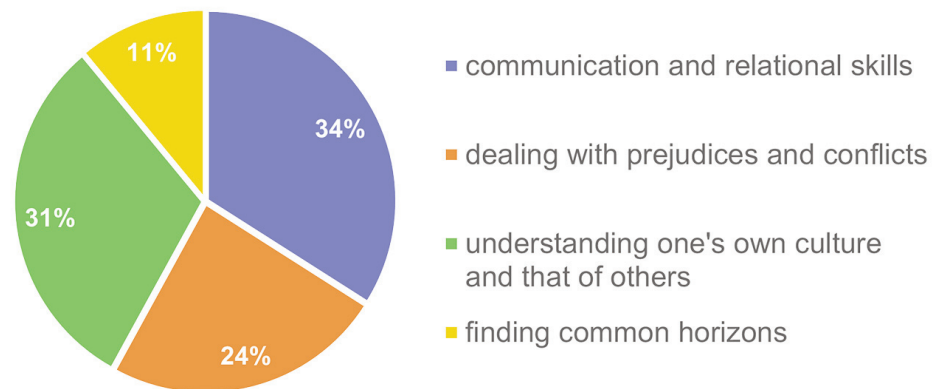
This is the clearest category, as it emphasises mutual interchange and makes manifest whether there has actually been an intercultural experience. If one were to

absolutize a view that considers intercultural competence on a continuum from a minimum level of competence to a maximum one, this fourth category might appear as the one in which a high degree of ‘cultural sensitivity’ is recorded. Following this view, the interpretation of the results obtained in this survey would lead one to note that there are few cases (only 11%) in which the participants demonstrate a high level of ‘intercultural sensitivity’ (Graph. 4), and in conclusion it could be said that there was a lack of intercultural competences in the participants.

However, in line with the hypothesis – if one considers intercultural competences as a system in which various competences and sub-competences interpenetrate – at that point, one can propose a more articulated interpretation of the latter outcome that enhances and incentivises the development of all competences, both the more general and the intercultural specific ones.

From a pedagogical point of view, this interpretation emphasises that there are ‘multiple points of attack’ and that the development of intercultural competences passes through various experiences and training paths that value formal and non-formal experiences, as well as informal ones as I suggest in the final part of this contribution.

Graph. 4 – Distribution in % of subcategories referring to ‘skills’



Source: The graph is generated by the MAXQDA software

The examples I propose for this last category are three. The first narrates the epilogue of an incident that occurred during pastoral work in an Italian parish. A Kenyan woman religious – who had perceived an attitude of rejection on the part of a group of Italian adolescents towards her and had told the animators with whom she worked about her discomfort – narrates that the dialogue led to a confrontation that resulted in a change of strategy with the adolescents and a transformation on both sides.

“By dialoguing, I discovered that diversity gives us the opportunity to discover common values that we sometimes do not know. I then realised that I had done well to continue using my way of communicating and trying to gain respect, but I realised that it was basically the desire of the other educators as well” (12_KE_Rel).

At the end of the narrative-writing activity, in her final remarks, the student reflects on the incident and its development. She becomes aware that in interpreting the difficulty she experienced at the beginning with the boys, she had focused mainly on the ethnic factors and less on other aspects including the boys’ age-related characteristics.

“The activity made me realise that my cultural identity is really an ongoing process and that it is born and developed in dialogue with others or other cultures and therefore to grow in my identity requires real dialogue that leads to a better relationship with others” (12_KE_Rel).

A second example is that of an Italian student and refers to the university context.

“When faced with people of a different nationality and culture from my own, I must first speak softly, explain well what I am saying. If it were to happen to me again, I would put people in a position to understand me better by explaining the reasons for certain behaviours, I would grasp their discomfort even earlier, and I could make a premise at the beginning of our relationship. This experience taught me to become more aware and also to learn more about my way of doing things, which is typically Italian, and I learnt more about Indian and Vietnamese culture” (26_IT_Lai).

A third example, relates to the experience of the student who receives a cloth as a gift from a fellow Indian student, which I mentioned earlier. In one of the few narratives that has a positive outcome, the student writes as follows:

“After three years in Italy, she was able to get to know and deal with Italian culture. I guess she compared my culture with hers because when handing over the gift my friend made an introduction explaining that it was an important thought according to her culture and that it came from her own land” (40_IT_Lai).

In conclusion, the result of the analysis on the skills acted upon confirmed what also emerged in other parts of the research presented in this volume, in particular in the activity proposed in the third focus group through the filling in of a form in which participants were asked to select the intercultural skills they considered necessary to live in multicultural contexts. The answers focused on basic aspects (welcoming, dialogue, listening, respect, patience, flexibility) and to a lesser extent on specific skills such as (decentralising, reducing stereotypes and prejudices, understanding meanings, finding common horizons). This result confirms that there is a need to initiate systematic educational courses geared towards the development of intercultural competences.

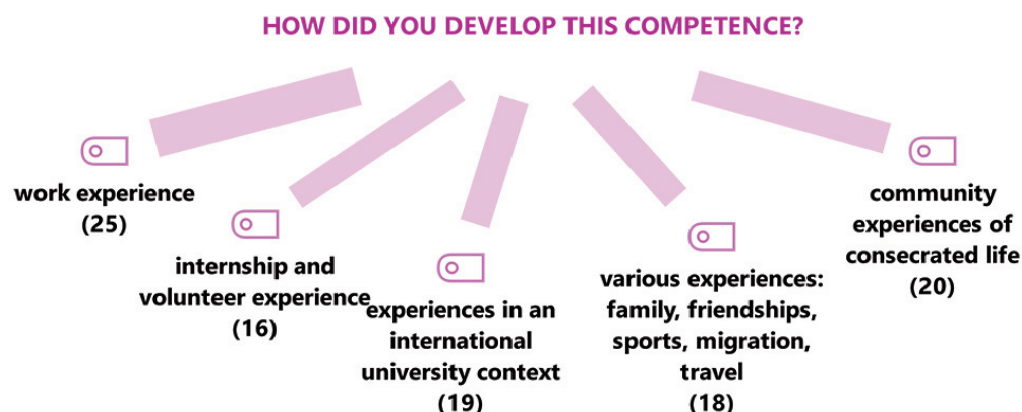
6.6 The development of competences

At the end of their narrative-writing activity, participants also provided some information on how they believe they developed the described competences.

There are five subcategories grouping together the contexts in which the participants recognise having had experiences that fostered the development of competences in them: work experience (25); community experiences of consecrated life (20); experiences in an international university context (19); internship and volunteer experience (16); various experiences: family, friendships, sporting activities, travel for migration or tourism (18) (Fig. 22).

Here are some statements that highlight the value of a theoretical-practical approach that involves both the acquisition of knowledge and awareness and the exercise of competences in the university environment and in field experience. Two Italian students, both laywomen, point out an aspect that they consider central to the education received in the university context of the PFSEA⁵²: the importance of the anthropological conception and of an integral vision of the person, which they recognise as a fundamental aspect for the development (and for the exercise) of intercultural competences.

Fig. 22 – Contexts and experiences that have contributed to the development of intercultural competences



Source: The figure is generated in MAXQDA with the hierarchical code-subcode model function.

“Thanks to university, I have had the opportunity to consciously use and increase this competence at both an experiential and theoretical level through the study of disciplines that have increased my awareness of who the person is” (63_IT_Lai).

“I [...] have had the opportunity to consolidate this competence in my university career, during which I have been able to reflect on issues concerning the person and his or her value, and I have acquired notions that are enabling me to use this competence in a more conscious manner” (51_IT_Lai).

Others value internships and life experiences in various contexts including the family.

“I have developed this competence first and foremost through various personal experiences that have led me to always listen to those in front of me (without dwelling on initial prejudices), but also through internship activities that have given me greater confidence” (46_IT_Lai).

“[I developed it] thanks to the upbringing I had from my family, which helped me to minimise prejudice and, therefore, to accept and understand (by decentralising and empathising) others who are not the same as me” (63_IT_Lai).

Reflecting on how intercultural competences are developed, there is an awareness that

“the skills put in place are the result of time” (45_CdA_Rel),

and that it is a process always in progress and never concluded:

“One must never think that these skills can be acquired once and for all, but one must be aware of the dynamism and flexibility they require, while being rooted in strong and solid values” (8_IT_Lai).

Moreover – as emerges from an overview of these last considerations and of the results inherent to the various aspects presented in the previous points – the process of developing intercultural competences requires a 360-degree approach oriented to-

wards the acquisition of a combination of cognitive and metacognitive, motivational, volitional, affective aspects. It also requires commitment and responsibility in *building* in oneself (and promoting in those undergoing education) an interrelated set of knowledge and notions, awareness, values and motivations, attitudes and skills that grow through experience and encounters with people and situations that “*open one’s mind*” and the testimony of significant people.

“Reflecting on my life journey, I realised that first of all, my family, especially my mother, had a great influence on the development of this competence. Her way of being and relating to others was a great example for me to never stop at appearances but to go deep and understand the emotions and thoughts of others” (49_IT_Lai).

7

The use of critical incidents in educational contexts

A question arises at this point: ‘Can the *narration of challenging situations or critical incidents* help to promote the development of some basic and specific competences necessary for experiencing interculture?’. The balance of the three-year action-research-training that made possible the collection of the 75 critical incidents analysed here allows me to affirm – also on the basis of the results of the broader research in which this project is inserted – that the work to be done first personally and then in confrontation with others through autobiographical narratives and listening to the other’s narrative allows one to exercise reflexivity, the ability to return to oneself and to the experiences lived, and to become aware of the competences required to live interculture.

7.1 A first assessment

By reflecting on significant incidents experienced in the first person and reconsidering the other person’s point of view in addition to one’s own, the person can come to better explain/interpret and understand one’s own way of acting and that of others. In this way, a transformative learning process can be activated through reflexivity⁵³. The experience of writing about a critical incident experienced, and/or reading about an incident experienced by others can itself be a learning resource in view of future experiences.

Reflection and re-elaboration of a case experienced in the first person or narrated by others, which can be approached in a group or individually with the methodology of case analysis, can lead the person to elaborate acquisitions that can be useful in view of future experiences in which he/she can apply old and new competences and skills. The memory of what was learnt in the experience becomes a springboard for future experiences in a different way. Here are two examples:

“I am more aware of this situation and remembering that fact makes me approach people from different cultures from my own with the knowledge that this adds a richness to my personal and professional life” (5_VT_Rel).

“When I think back on the moments of misunderstanding I experienced, I think that those moments served me as an experience and will certainly help me in the future in dealing with other situations in which I will feel misunderstood and unable to communicate” (25_IT_Lai).

The effectiveness of learning *in the* and *from* experience has been theorised by various scholars, including John Dewey and David Kolb. The latter described learn-

ing as a circular succession of four phases: the making of concrete experience; the reflection on lived experience; the abstract conceptualisation and generalisation of what has resulted from the experience and, finally, the implementation of what has been learnt in a new concrete experience by knowing how to deal with it and consider it with a new approach⁵⁴.

The experience of the 75 participants, mostly female students in education as educators, consisted in writing a narrative about a critical episode they had experienced. In doing so, they were guided to understand the effectiveness of this methodology and its possible applications in formation and educational contexts.

A limitation of the present investigation is that it is not possible, due to the scarce documentation collected, to verify the education effectiveness of the critical incident writing experience and the effects of this activity on the participants. However, on the basis of the available information, it is possible to make some observations on the effectiveness of the tool used in line with what has already emerged in other studies, surveys and similar training projects⁵⁵.

There are 34 codings referring to the effects of the activity on the participants. Some of the information was written in the 'Any observations' section of the form containing the outline for drafting the narrative; others were received in e-mail messages and in informal interviews held at the end of the experience, which were transcribed by the educator/tutor at the bottom of the respective forms. Here are a few examples that attest to the effect the activity had on the narrator.

Taking stock of the usefulness of the activity of writing her own story, a student writes:

"I did not immediately realise that my colleague's attitude was one of cultural difference. Thanks to this activity, which allowed me to look at the fact from the outside, I learnt to decentralise and that it is important to reflect in a detached manner on events that one does not fully understand in the moment one is experiencing them" (63_IT_Lai).

Another student recognises that she has gained a new awareness through the work of re-reading her experience and highlights one of the aspects learnt:

"Re-reading this incident, I realised that the key moment was the confrontation with the other volunteers. If I had limited myself to my first reading of the incident, I would still be convinced by now that the man was insensitive. Instead, the fact that I questioned myself and tried to understand whether there was something else going on made me realise that everything was due to a gesture to which I and the girl's uncle attributed a different meaning" (72_IT_Lai).

The last example refers to a decision that the narrator claims to have implemented. Recalling an experience of suffering in a community life context, in which there had been repeated incidents of misunderstanding, the student – after completing the drafting of the form – decided to write a letter to the person with whom she had had a difficulty. Afterwards, she narrated how she had felt at the time and that (thanks to the activity) she had realised she had made a mistake; in the letter of reply she received, she was able to learn that the incident had also been challenging for the other person, who was also aware of having made mistakes with her (16_AL_Lai). Finally, some participants felt the need to thank the educator/tutor for the activity performed. I give just one example of a woman religious who joined the online activity.

"I thank you because collaborating has enriched me so much and given me the opportunity to put myself on the line. For me it was also a test of myself" (30_IT_Rel).

7.2 A case analysis

Some of the 75 critical incident narratives, of which many examples have been given in this report, could be used in various educational contexts as cases to be analysed either individually or in small groups, with a final sharing in which the process and what has been learnt from the analysis activity is reflected upon. The selected narratives could be introduced with a short video interview and an outline of questions could be constructed to guide the case analysis work. Examples of the use of critical incident cases in multicultural contexts are numerous and case catalogues can also be found⁵⁶; the use of case or critical incident analysis as an educational tool is confirmed by studies and research⁵⁷.

In this last point, I provide an example that I selected from the 75 narratives collected in this research. It is a case that stands out for the clarity of the narrative and the narrator's ability to recognise and describe her emotions. The student, a young Haitian woman religious, recalls an incident that relates a different way of understanding an aspect of corporeality. Narrating what she thought immediately after the incident, she writes:

"I told an Italian fellow, 'You've put on weight!'. I immediately understood from her reaction that I did something wrong. [...] She looked at me without answering and moved to another desk. Two other students who were nearby observed the scene laughing. I was surprised, I did not understand the girl's reaction, it was a sincere compliment I was paying her. I approached her to ask the reason for her attitude and if she had any problems, but she did not answer me. I also asked her if I had said something wrong, but she continued to ignore me. I felt sad and rejected, I did not insist and went back to my seat" (29_HA_Rel).

After specifying a custom learnt in her home context – *"in my culture, thin people, women especially, are not considered attractive"* – the student describes the development of the situation. In the narrative, one can see the interweaving of thoughts, actions, emotions and the ability to reflect on oneself and seek dialogue.

"One day I got the idea to ask the two students who had witnessed the scene what they thought. Since they were hesitant to speak, I said I wanted to understand their reaction and explained to them the concept of female beauty in my context. They looked at each other laughing and then explained to me that in Italy they had a different idea of beauty.

At that point I began to realise the big mistake I had made. At first I was a little angry because in my opinion, she had behaved as someone who was not very mature, she could have told me that she did not like it. Later, I remembered seeing her cry and told myself that the wound must be deeper or hiding another problem. I waited another week before I found the courage to approach her to ask for a moment of dialogue, I was afraid she would reject me again, but this time she accepted" (29_HA_Rel).

The analysis of emotions and, more generally, of the various aspects of the incident is rich in detail. In the last part of the narrative, the uneasy moods are alleviated, the dialogue (sought and desired by both of them) allows the misunderstanding to be clarified. Reflecting on the effects, the student notes that the incident – which on an external reading could be seen as a misunderstanding about a minor incident – led to a 'loss of spontaneity' in her.

"We resolved the conflict, but I must admit that this event made me take a step back in my spontaneity towards others, and made me more cautious. Paradoxically, I have grown in observing, in listening to others and especially in asking questions about different aspects of a new culture in which I find myself" (29_HA_Rel).

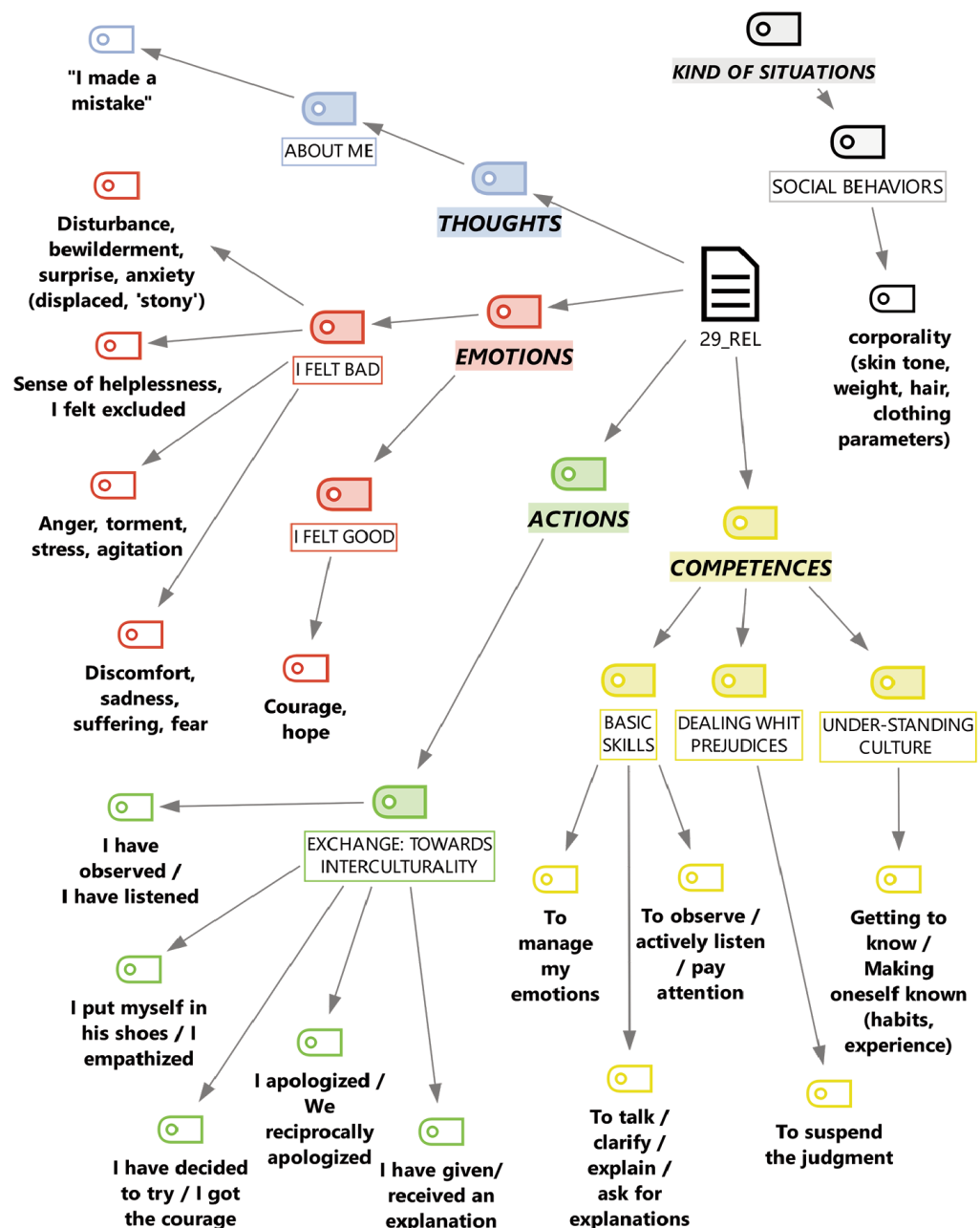
In conclusion, taking stock, the student writes:

“Now, with the passage of time, the situation seems easier to me, not even as tragic, but at the time I experienced it, it was really painful” (29_HA_Rel).

Figure 23 shows the map of the entire narrative generated with MAXQDA, i.e. the set of codings that were assigned to the parts of the narrative. By looking at the individual aspects, one can detect the resources of an intellectual, emotional and behavioural nature that the student put into action and the general and specific competences that she acknowledges having acted.

The narrative could be proposed as a case study in a workshop. The full text of the narrative and an outline of questions to guide reflection could be provided, with a time for individual work and a time for group work, assigning the task of codifying the narrative by constructing a grid similar to the one provided in Figure 23.

Fig. 23 – Single case model: the narrative of a Haitian student



Source: The Figure is generated by MAXQDA software with the single-case model function, code hierarchy.

At the end of this research report, the metaphor of *building*, which appears in the title of this contribution to evoke the experience and the *work* (of self-education and education) that is required for the development of intercultural competences, reveals all the complexity of this *undertaking*.

The protagonist of the *enterprise* of 'becoming competent' in living interculture is certainly the person who is called upon to consciously assume the responsibility of self-education in a perspective of lifelong learning as a necessary condition for self-development and active, responsible and supportive participation in society⁵⁸. If the awareness of the need and urgency to develop (and promote) this and other key citizenship competences is evident and unquestionable in all spheres of life, study and work – for decades there have been quality educational experiences in various spheres – nevertheless, as emerges in other contributions to the research presented in this volume, in many contexts the initiatives that intentionally and systematically promote the development of intercultural competences are not yet widespread, are often sporadic and not integrated in broader institutional projects⁵⁹.

Educational institutes and educators who have the task and responsibility to encourage and foster this intercultural competence-building enterprise should:

- *promote* a reflection on the need (and urgency) to take charge of the promotion of basic and specific competences to experience interculture from a *lifelong learning* perspective and with a global approach that does not end with the introduction of a course or a few occasional and disconnected initiatives but permeates the entire *curriculum* and/or educational project;
- *converge* on common objectives centred on the promotion of communication and interpersonal competences and the ability to recognise and deal with emotions and prejudices; know and critically interpret one's own and other people's culture; search for/find common values walking towards a 'critical humanism'⁶⁰;
- *foster experiential learning* involving workshop experiences by enhancing methodologies such as case studies, critical incident narratives, *storytelling*⁶¹, e-portfolios;
- *allocate* spaces, create opportunities, devote time to the realisation of formal, non-formal and informal activities to encourage and enable experiences of interchange and interaction;
- *collect and network* good practices, projects, educational tools⁶².

For decades now, experts have been indicating that educational action that seeks to promote the development of intercultural competences requires a global approach. It cannot be introduced as a marginal, stand-alone project, as one of the educations – to global citizenship, to sustainable development, to ecology – but is to be discovered, *invented* and organised as a central dimension running through all formation and educational action in multicultural contexts.

The development of intercultural competences is a job that deals with the construction of personal identity interconnected with the social and professional one, it requires «the awareness of one's own individuality and diversity with respect to others, often called distinctiveness; continuity as permanence of one's identity over time; coherence as permanence of it in different experiential situations»⁶³. Each of us constructs himself in interaction with others, experiences belonging at the same time to a plurality of affiliations, to more than one reference group, not only cultural, but also political, social, religious.

Educational environments have the duty and responsibility to support the person in this enterprise of self-building with attention to cognitive, affective and motivational aspects and to the ethical and value dimension in a challenging, enriching and trans-

forming interchange with the other(s). The costs that could result from not taking on this educational and formation task are high. In the present context it should be evident to all that the lack of competences to live intercultural (i.e. *intercultural incompetence*⁶⁴) has repercussions on our being human persons and on our living together in the world.

Today, «in this time that we are given to live, recognising the dignity of every human person, we can revive among all a worldwide aspiration for fraternity as ‘*brothers all*’»⁶⁵. At present, with realism – but looking to the future – we can practise thinking of the Covid-19 pandemic as a ‘vital catastrophe’⁶⁶, that is, a catastrophe that can be and become ‘educating’ for us to the extent that we become aware that it *opens up* a process of personal growth.

For this reason it is necessary and urgent to educate in particular educators, teachers, trainers so that they themselves develop the intercultural competences that they have the duty and the responsibility to promote in young people with the awareness that not only intercultural education, but education itself «*is realised in the relationship*, in the authentic meeting of persons in full respect of reciprocal freedom, in a fundamentally personalising, mediating and animating action. In this process, the commitment to foster in young people the growth of the capacity to live together, in harmony with everyone, in solidarity for the common good becomes fundamental»⁶⁷.





Appendix

Full codebook of the file "Incidenti critici_backup.mx20" (generated by MAQDA, 23/01/2022)

| | |
|--|----------|
| 1. KIND OF SITUATIONS | 0 |
| 1.1 Communication | 0 |
| 1.1.1 linguistics (lexical poverty, short and confusing conversations) | 13 |
| 1.1.2 paralinguistics (tone, frequency, rhythm, silence) | 1 |
| 1.1.3 kinesics (eye contact, facial expressions, gestures) | 3 |
| 1.1.4 proxemics (way of occupying space) | 2 |
| 1.1.5 haptic (through physical contact, way of greeting) | 6 |
| 1.1.6 approach: direct, playful, respectful | 4 |
| 1.1.7 way of expressing emotions | 2 |
| 1.2 Social behaviors | 0 |
| 1.2.1 food / drink / smoking | 4 |
| 1.2.2 corporeality (skin tone, weight, hair, clothing parameters) | 5 |
| 1.2.3 personal hygiene (shower, smell) | 2 |
| 1.2.4 privacy management | 2 |
| 1.2.5 relationship with colleagues and superiors | 6 |
| 1.2.6 reprimand / warning | 4 |
| 1.2.7 compliance with rules and regulations | 7 |
| 1.2.8 educational styles and interventions | 5 |
| 1.2.9 traditions (use of things) | 4 |
| 1.2.10 liturgy (rhythm and pronunciation) | 2 |
| 1.3 Social attitudes | 0 |
| 1.3.1 ethnic and religious stereotypes and prejudices | 7 |
| 1.3.2 gender stereotypes (woman / man relationship, emancipation) | 5 |
| 1.3.3 belonging / separation to / between ethnic groups | 3 |
| 1.3.4 sensitivity to the experience of migration | 4 |
| 2. What did you think immediately? THOUGHTS | 0 |
| 2.1 about the other | 0 |
| 2.1.1 "The other sees the reality / behaves differently" | 11 |
| 2.1.2 "He is distant, is detached" | 4 |
| 2.1.3 "He has a prejudice towards me", "He is angry with me" | 10 |
| 2.1.4 "He doesn't understand that what I said is right" | 9 |
| 2.1.5 "He's wrong" | 5 |
| 2.1.6 "He's narrow minded" | 3 |
| 2.2 about me | 0 |
| 2.2.1 "I don't know and I don't know what to expect" | 3 |
| 2.2.2 "I don't understand why he says (or behave) like this to me" | 12 |
| 2.2.3 "I am unable to handle this situation" | 10 |
| 2.2.4 "I made a mistake" | 3 |
| 2.2.5 "I confirmed my stereotype" | 7 |
| 2.3 about the situation | 0 |
| 2.3.1 "Language is an obstacle", "There is no understanding" | 7 |
| 2.3.2 "It is immediate and simple to think that what is different is not good" | 1 |
| 2.3.3 "There are other factors besides the ethnic one" | 6 |
| 2.3.4 "There are things in common" | 2 |

| | |
|---|----------|
| 3. What have you done? ACTIONS | 0 |
| 3.1 Interchange: absent or problematic | 0 |
| 3.1.1 I remained centered on myself | 3 |
| 3.1.2 I have made a judgment (Prejudice) | 8 |
| 3.1.3 I defended myself / I asserted my right | 2 |
| 3.1.4 I spoke strongly | 2 |
| 3.1.5 I was ready to go / I went away/turned away | 7 |
| 3.1.6 I ignored / I did not answer / I did not ask for an explanation | 4 |
| 3.1.7 I have stopped participating / I closed myself | 5 |
| 3.1.8 I didn't notice right away / I wasn't aware | 4 |
| 3.1.9 I couldn't/didn't manage to explain | 3 |
| 3.2 Interchange: weak or superficial | 0 |
| 3.2.1 I have observed / I have listened | 18 |
| 3.2.2 I needed some time | 13 |
| 3.2.3 I have been patient | 3 |
| 3.2.4 I asked for help / I was helped | 14 |
| 3.3 Interchange: towards interculturality | 0 |
| 3.3.1 I have given/received an explanation | 0 |
| 3.3.1.1 I searched for information | 3 |
| 3.3.1.2 I asked for an explanation | 11 |
| 3.3.1.3 I have received an explanation | 12 |
| 3.3.1.3.1 The explanation was not enough for me | 2 |
| 3.3.1.4 I explained (what it means to me) | 18 |
| 3.3.1.4.1 I asked questions to make him understand | 1 |
| 3.3.2 I have been thinking in order to understand the problem/need | 16 |
| 3.3.3 I put myself in his shoes / I empathized | 13 |
| 3.3.4 I apologized / We reciprocally apologized | 12 |
| 3.3.5 I have decided to try / I got the courage | 9 |
| 3.3.6 I have sought and implemented a solution | 14 |
| 4. What did you feel? EMOTIONS | 0 |
| 4.1 I felt bad: I felt... | 0 |
| 4.1.1 Discomfort, sadness, suffering, fear | 19 |
| 4.1.2 Anger, torment, stress, agitation | 19 |
| 4.1.3 Disturbance, bewilderment, surprise, anxiety (displaced, 'stony') | 15 |
| 4.1.4 Feeling observed, strange, misunderstood, criticized, 'pulling the leg' | 8 |
| 4.1.5 Embarrassment, shame, humiliation | 19 |
| 4.1.6 Discouragement, despondency, distrust (I was exhausted) | 8 |
| 4.1.7 Sense of helplessness / I felt excluded | 16 |
| 4.1.8 Feeling the prejudice of others on oneself | 7 |
| 4.2 I felt good: I felt ... | 0 |
| 4.2.1 Amazement, surprise (in a positive sense) | 1 |
| 4.2.2 Curiosity, interest | 10 |
| 4.2.3 Courage, hope | 5 |
| 4.2.4 Joy, happiness | 7 |
| 4.2.5 Calm, serenity, self-control / I was at ease | 9 |
| 4.2.6 Gratitude | 1 |
| 4.2.7 Satisfaction | 4 |
| 5. What skills have you put in place? COMPETENCES | 0 |
| 5.1 Communication and relational skills | 0 |

| | |
|--|----------|
| 5.1.1 To observe / actively listen / pay attention | 14 |
| 5.1.2 To reflect / Don't be satisfied with the first intuition | 7 |
| 5.1.3 To talk / clarify / explain / ask for explanations | 12 |
| 5.1.4 To communicate through various languages (verbal and non verbal) | 12 |
| 5.1.5 To manage my emotions | 13 |
| 5.1.6 Problem solving | 6 |
| 5.2 Dealing with prejudices and conflicts | 0 |
| 5.2.1 To recognize one's own prejudices and those of others and make them explicit | 14 |
| 5.2.2 To suspend the judgment | 10 |
| 5.2.3 Decentralizing / Being empathetic / Overcoming self-centeredness | 20 |
| 5.3 Understanding one's own culture and that of others | 0 |
| 5.3.1 Getting to know / Making oneself known (habits, experience) | 10 |
| 5.3.1.1 Examples of exchange of understandings | 2 |
| 5.3.2 Curiosity in learning different customs | 14 |
| 5.3.3 Awareness of factors' multiplicity / Contextualizing | 18 |
| 5.3.3.1 Negative example | 1 |
| 5.3.4 To comprehend the other's point of view | 12 |
| 5.4 Finding common horizons | 0 |
| 5.4.1 Awareness that cultural identity is dynamic | 1 |
| 5.4.2 Find a common point | 13 |
| 5.4.3 Exchange of reciprocal transformation | 2 |
| 5.4.4 Search for a common horizon/meanings | 5 |
| 6. How did you develop this competence? DEVELOPMENT | 0 |
| 6.1 Various experiences: family, friendships, sports, migration, travel | 18 |
| 6.2 Community experiences of consecrated life | 20 |
| 6.3 Internship and volunteer experience | 16 |
| 6.4 Work experience | 25 |
| 6.5 Experiences in an international university context | 19 |
| 7. How has the situation evolved? EVOLUTION | 0 |
| 7.1 Skills in the making | 1 |
| 7.2 Adaptation Welcome, inclusion | 5 |
| 7.3 Opening / acceptance / contamination | 8 |
| 7.3.1 A fact / person that opens my mind | 6 |
| 7.3.1.1 Intervention of the formator with the whole community | 1 |
| 7.4 Loss of spontaneity | 1 |
| 7.5 Impact of the activity | 9 |
| 7.6 Incomplete narratives | 1 |



* The code system is the result of Enrica Ottone's coding work in collaboration with Francesca Fratarcangeli.

Endnotes

1. The action-research-training project *Multiculturalism and Intercultural Competences in Ecclesiastical Institution of Higher Education and in Formation Communities of Consecrated Life* was carried out in Italy during the years 2018-2021, involved educators and members of formation communities of consecrated life, as well as teachers and students from a number of ecclesiastical institutions of higher education studies. The project, funded by the GHR (Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhurst) Foundation, was coordinated by Luca Pandolfi, full professor at Pontifical Urbaniana University in Rome, and the Author of the present contribution, Enrica Ottone, professor at PFSEA.
2. The majority of the participants in this activity come from the PFSEA in Rome, which has joined and participated from the very beginning in the research *Intercultural Competences in Universities and Consecrated Life* promoted by the PUU. In the academic year 2020-2021, PFSEA students, faculty and staff were from more than 50 countries: 40% of the students (mostly men and women religious) and 27% of the staff are of non-Italian origin. The female component is predominant.
3. Translated from the Italian original: P. REGGIO, *La ricerca sulle competenze interculturali di insegnanti ed educatori*, in P. REGGIO – M. SANTERINI (eds.), *Le competenze interculturali nel lavoro educativo*, Carocci, Roma 2013, 53.
4. Translated from the Italian original: M. SANTERINI, *Introduzione. Competenze interculturali: ricerca e formazione*, in REGGIO – SANTERINI (eds.), *Le competenze*, 12.
5. Cf. E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI, *Interculturality in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities: An Action-Research-Training Project in Italy*, in IID (eds.), *Education in Multiculturalism, Education to Interculturality in Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy*, Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2023, 39-40.
6. Cf. M. PELLEREY, *L'identità professionale oggi. Natura e costruzione*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2021, 14.
7. Cf. D.K. DEARDORFF, *Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization*, "Journal of Studies in International Education" 10 (2006) 3, 241-266; A. FANTINI, *Exploring and Assessing Intercultural Competence* (CSD Research Paper No. 07-01), Washington University – Center for Social Development, St. Louis, MO 2007; B.H. SPITZBERG – G. CHANGNON, *Conceptualizing Intercultural Competence*, in D.K. DEARDORFF (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, CA 2009, 2-52; M. SANTERINI, *Intercultural Competence Teacher-training Models: The Italian Experience*, in OECD (ed.), *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Meeting the Challenge*, Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris 2010.
8. The expression is frequently used in the plural to account for the complex interrelationships of so many elements. Cf. UNESCO (ed.), *Intercultural Competencies. Conceptual and Operational Framework*, UNESCO 2013, 16. The question of whether to decline the construct 'intercultural competence(s)' in the singular or plural is addressed and resolved differently in M. BAIUTTI, *Protocollo di valutazione Intercultura. Comprendere, problematizzare e valutare la mobilità studentesca Internazionale*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2019, 62.
9. Translated from the Italian original: PELLEREY, *L'identità*, 50. Cf. J. DEWEY, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, Modern Library, New York, NY 1922, 15-42 (It. transl.: *Natura e condotta dell'uomo: introduzione alla psicologia sociale*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1958, 38-42).
10. Cf. M. SANTERINI, *Intercultura*, La Scuola, Brescia 2003; EAD., *Competenze interculturali e pluralismo sociale*, "Studi Emigrazione/Migration Studies" 49 (2012) 186, 275; EAD., *Introduzione* 11-12.

11. The definition combines contributions from various authors and is based on the concept of *competence* formulated by Michele Pellerey as follows: «A competence manifests itself because one is able to set in motion and coordinate a set of knowledge, skills and other internal dispositions in order to successfully perform a task or activity to be undertaken; moreover, to perform one's task well, one must be able to identify, use and coordinate very often not only the necessary internal resources, but also the available external ones». (Translated from the Italian original: M. PELLEREY, *Le competenze individuali e il portfolio*, RCS Libri, Milano 2004, 64).
12. Cf. P. REGGIO – E. DODI, *Le competenze interculturali di insegnanti ed educatori*, "OPPIInformazioni" (2017) 123, 18; SPITZBERG – CHANGNON, *Conceptualizing*, 2-52.
13. The course in Intercultural Pedagogy is a one-semester education activity for a total of 5 ECTS (*European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*) that forms part of the curricula of the Master's degree courses in Pedagogical Sciences and Pedagogy and Didactics of Religion at the PFSEA. The author has been teaching since the 2004-2005 academic year.
14. In this part of the activity, individual story-writing work was accompanied by a tutor trained by me. The difficulty in completing the work can be attributed at least in part to the lockdown and containment measures of the Covid-19 pandemic that affected Italy in the months in which this part of the research took place.
15. Cf. G. AUDET, *Intervention pédagogique et diversité ethnoculturelle: théorisation de récits de pratique d'enseignantes et d'enseignants, et défis de formation*, "Éducation et francophonie" 46 (2018) 2, 92-108; S. DESGAGNÉ, *Récits exemplaires de pratique enseignante: analyse typologique*, Presses de l'Université du Québec, Québec 2005.
16. The term *critical incidents* is used by J.C. FLANAGAN [*The Critical Incident Technique*, "Psychol Bull" 51 (1954), 4, 327-358. doi: 10.1037/h0061470] in reference to a technique of gathering information on critical situations in order to understand their consequences and develop improvements. In the field of education, critical incidents are used not only as an investigation technique, but also as an educational tool in various contexts including professional development. Cf. C. LECLERC – B. BOURASSA – O. FILTEAU, *Utilisation de la méthode des incidents critiques dans une perspective d'explicitation, d'analyse critique et de transformation des pratiques professionnelles*, "Éducation et francophonie" 38 (2010) 1, 11-32.
17. Cf. B.W. WHITE – D. GRATTON, *L'atelier de situations interculturelles: une méthodologie pour comprendre l'acte à poser en contexte pluriethnique*, "Alterstice" 7 (2017) 1, 63-76.
18. The project entitled *Récits et formation* of the Faculty of Education of the Canadian University of Laval is presented on the website: <http://www.recitdepratique.fse.ulaval.ca/>; <https://archive.is/lqN5N>.
19. Translated from the Italian original: G. AUDET, *La diversità culturale nei racconti di pratiche di insegnamento*, in REGGIO – SANTERINI (eds.), *Le competenze*, 36.
20. *Ibid.*, 41.
21. Cf. *ibid.*, 36.
22. Cf. *ibid.*, 35; D.A. SCHÖN, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, Basic Books, New York, NY 1983, 49-51 (It. transl.: *Il professionista riflessivo. Per una nuova epistemologia della pratica professionale*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari 1993, 76-78). The account of practices in this case involves the narration of a problematic situation encountered in multicultural school contexts and includes moments of individual reflection and moments of group reflection. Cf. S. DESGAGNÉ, *Appropriation d'un savoir délibératif en formation à l'enseignement à partir d'une approche d'analyse de récits en groupe*, "Revue internationale de pédagogie de l'enseignement supérieur" 29 (2013) 2, 1-23.
23. Translated from the Italian original: REGGIO, *La ricerca*, 53.
24. Cf. *ibid.*, 54, 58; P. VERMERSCH, *Descrivere il lavoro. Nuovi strumenti per la formazione e la ricerca: l'intervista di esplicitazione*, trad. it. a cura di V. CESARI LUSSO e A. IANNACCONE, Carocci, Roma 2005.
25. The use of critical incidents in an educational context is presented in L. MORTARI, *Apprendere dall'esperienza. Il pensare riflessivo nella formazione*, Carocci, Roma 2005, 118 ss.

26. Cf. P. ANGELIDES, *The Development of an Efficient Technique for Collecting and Analyzing Qualitative Data: The Analysis of Critical Incidents*, "International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education" 14 (2001) 3, 429-442.
27. The tool is published in REGGIO, *La ricerca*, 60.
28. Cf. R. SEMERARO, *L'analisi qualitativa dei dati di ricerca in educazione*, "Giornale Italiano della Ricerca Educativa" 4 (2011) 7, 93; ANGELIDES, *The Development*, 429-442; R. VIGANÒ, *Pedagogia e sperimentazione. Metodi e strumenti per la ricerca educativa*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 2002, 238-243.
29. The qualitative analysis software MAXQDA (Analytics Pro 2020 version) from the German company Verbi GmbH was used in combination with a matrix created in Microsoft Excel for the classification of the forms and the qualitative analysis of the data contained therein.
30. Cf. U. KUCKARTZ – S. RÄDIKER, *Analyzing Qualitative Data with MAXQDA: Text, Audio, and Video*, Cham, Springer 2019.
31. A code is a string that on MAXQDA can contain up to 63 characters.
32. The coding was done by the author and was revised and integrated by Dr Francesca Fratarcangeli.
33. The answer to the question on the effects of the activity and the possible evolution was not explicitly asked to the participants, especially at the beginning of the project, and that is why the number of codings is limited to 32.
34. Cf. N. DELIU, *Multiculturalism and Interculturality: A Qualitative Analysis of the Perspective of Focus Group Participants*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 118.
35. The term "communication" (and later communication competence) is used to refer generally to situations of interchange of a message between two or more people and joint construction (or co-construction) of meaning (UNESCO, *Intercultural competencies*, 12). There are numerous studies on the concept of adequate and effective communication in multicultural contexts that use the expression 'intercultural communicative competence'. Cf. M. BYRAM, *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon 1997.
36. Under the label *educational styles and interventions*, a number of episodes have been grouped together referring to factors inherent in the way a person is educated from/into a cultural context different from one's own.
37. An example of a survey that resulted in a list of sensitive areas that can give rise to critical incidents in educational contexts is the following: AA.VV., *Culture Shocks in Higher Education. A Reader for International Students and Faculty: How to Turn Critical Incidents into a Learning Opportunity*, Solvic – Solving intercultural conflicts with international students, 2020. In: <http://solvinc.eu/results/>; <https://archive.is/70GKp>.
38. Also in this category, in some of the 75 documents, many expressions referring to immediate thoughts have been coded.
39. For a description of the *IramuteQ* software and its specifications see: F. DERIU, *Intercultural Competences in Education and Formation Communities: Key Concepts Identified by the Text Analyses of Focus Groups*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 72-79.
40. The 75 stories were merged into a single document and the entire corpus was subjected to the automatic parsing and normalisation processes. The main lexicometric measures (as reported in the rows below) were calculated to validate the database. The text corpus of 44,384 occurrences is small in size (but still over 20,000) and there are 3,326 different graphic forms. There are 1,388 hapax. The TTR and %Hapax measures confirm the suitability of the *corpus* for automatic processing:
- | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| TTR (<i>Type Token Ratio</i>) | |
| $V / N \cdot 100$ | $3,326/44,384 \cdot 100 = 7.5\%$ |
| % Hapax | |
| $V_1 / V \cdot 100$ | $1,388/3,326 \cdot 100 = 41.7\%$ |

41. The verb 'to do' does not appear in the list, which is clearly in first place with 348 frequencies, more than double the number of other verbs in the list (the verb 'to say' appears 162 times). It has been excluded from the graph in order to highlight more clearly the distance between the other verbs, but it should not be overlooked since also in this corpus, as in the one analysed by Fiorenza Deriu in this volume, the verb 'to do' has a strong practical connotation: it indicates, for better or for worse, what has been done; it allows one to take stock of the situation, as well as to emphasise certain concepts, for example: 'the fact of welcoming', 'the fact of dialouging' (Cf. DERIU, *Intercultural*).
42. The risk is highlighted by Milena Santerini. Cf. M. SANTERINI, *Critical Intercultural Education between Similarities and Differences: Points of no Return, Choices and Strategies for Teaching Intercultural Competences*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 324.
43. In the analysis phase, after noting that the verb *to explain* and the noun *explanation* recurred frequently in the narratives to refer to actions, an automated search was carried out in all documents to identify and screen all occurrences of words containing the characters *spieg**.
44. DELIU, *Multiculturalism*, 123.
45. *Ibid.*, 147.
46. The reason for the choice can be better understood from the following reference that was written at the bottom of a form. The student, after having narrated the episode, takes stock of the skills she has put in place, indicating the ability to put herself in the other person's shoes. The tutor writes to her to review the narrative and asks her a question "Did you put it into action?", or "Would you have liked to put it into action?" (19_ZA_Rel) because in the description the stated competence does not seem to be evident.
47. Reggio, in presenting the results of the research, divides intercultural competences into 3 nuclei: *Reducing prejudices, Interpreting cultures, Finding shared horizons*. Cf. REGGIO, *Gli esiti*, 113.
48. *Ibid.*, 112.
49. The last subcategory, *problem solving* (6) – which is not shown in Figure 23 (in order to make the other labels in the category more readable) – groups together aspects relating to the ability to analyse the situation and to find and implement suitable interventions.
50. P. RICOEUR, *Dal testo all'azione. Saggi di ermeneutica*, Editoriale Jaca Book, Milano 2004², 168.
51. Cf. *ibid.*, 151; SANTERINI, *Intercultura*, 74.
52. At university level, the commitment to cultivate "a *Weltanschauung* worthy of the human person" is closely intertwined with the creation of an environment that fosters at all levels (formal, non-formal and informal) the development and exercise of intercultural competences. Cf. H.-C.A. CHANG, *Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione "Auxilium": un'istituzione internazionale "laboratorio" di formazione interculturale*, "Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione" 45 (2007) 3, 90-97.
53. Cf. S. BROOKFIELD, *Using Critical Incidents to Explore Learners' Assumptions*, in J. MEZIRROW et ALII (eds.), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA 1990, 177-193.
54. Cf. P. REGGIO, *Il quarto sapere. Guida all'apprendimento esperienziale*, Carocci, Roma 2010.
55. Cf. SANTERINI, *Critical*, 323-324.
56. A recent European project provides a guide and catalogue of critical incidents as an educational tool for health professionals in multicultural settings. Based on the case analysis method developed by Margalit Cohen-Emerique, the tool serves to reflect on the reasons for tension and to identify concrete solutions. Cf. <https://healthydiversity.eu/it/manual-critical-incidents/>; <https://archive.is/udi3k>.
57. In the Italian context, in addition to the research by Reggio and Santerini, see: M. DAMINI – A. SURIAN, *L'uso degli incidenti critici nella valutazione dello sviluppo delle competenze interculturali*, "Giornale Italiano della Ricerca Educativa" 5 (2012) 291-302; C. TARCHI – A. SURIAN, *Promoting Intercultural Competence in Study abroad Students*, "European Journal of Psychology of Education" (2021) 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-021-00554-0>; <https://archive.is/LcCiM>.

58. *Competence in Cultural Awareness and Expression* is one of the eight key competences of the European citizen listed in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning.
59. Cf. L. PANDOLFI, *Formation in Multiculturality, Formation towards Interculturality: Challenges to Embrace and Necessary Transformations*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 254.
60. The concept of critical humanism is used by Milena Santerini who recalls Selim Abou. Cf. S. ABOU, *Diritti e culture dell'uomo*, SEI, Torino 1995.
61. Cf. D.K. DEARDORFF, *Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies: Story Circles*, UNESCO and Routledge, Paris 2020.
62. There are numerous projects promoted by international organisations.
63. Translated from the Italian original: PELLERREY, *L'identità*, 12.
64. Cf. UNESCO, *Intercultural Competencies*, 38.
65. FRANCESCO, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti* (3 October 2020), n. 8.
66. Cf. C. GIACCARDI, "Vita tua, vita mia". *Che sia vitale il tempo virale. L'individualismo è astrazione*, "Avvenire" 19 marzo 2020: <https://www.avvenire.it/opinioni/pagine/che-sia-vitale-il-tempo-virale-lindividualismo-astrazion-063dab5f075c4b2eb3603729c1fe870e>; <https://archive.is/h8zMZ>.
67. H.-C.A. CHANG – M. SÉIDE, *Essere con i giovani oggi in contesti multiculturali. Implicanze per un educatore salesiano*, in M.A. CHINELLO – E. OTTONE – P. RUFFINATTO (eds.), *Educare è prevenire. Proposte per educatori*, LAS, Roma 2015, 203.



Formation in Multiculturality Formation towards Interculturality

Challenges to Embrace
and Necessary Transformations*

❖ Luca Pandolfi



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Abstract

The article closes the series of essays presenting the *action-research-training* on formation to interculturality in multicultural communities of ecclesiastical institutions of higher education, as well as Institutes of Consecrated Life in Italy. Through an anthropological approach and the interpretation of cultural processes, it presents a broad reflection on four years of participant observation and the analysis of results drawn from the employed qualitative and quantitative survey instruments. Although multicultural reality is often referred to as “richness”, it is still experienced and understood as a struggle for mutual linguistic understanding, and though it also appears as a possible coexistence of cultural differences, it rarely presents formative awareness and planning in view of intercultural competences and for the common construction of a plural and syncretic way. Differences emerge between the approaches of formators and the approach of candidates. The conclusions indicate possible paths to achieve formation that is adapted to the challenges of today’s plural and interconnected society.

Keywords

Multiculturality – Interculturality – intercultural competences – participant observation – qualitative research – formation, and education

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* Translated from the original
Italian by Roxanne Doerr

...real “interculturality” is more than just co-existing side by side with people from different nationalities or cultures. Rather, the ideal intercultural setting for interculturality provides a space or opportunity for people from different cultures to interact with each other and thereby mutually enrich and transform each other and those around them¹.

1

Not a conclusion... in narrative terms

This article, which closes the reading and interpretation of the results of our action-research-training, does not have the aim of concluding a discussion. There is still much work to be done. There is a part of the gathered data that requires further elaboration. There are various readings, with different angles and perspectives, that can offer further food for thought. The very instruments of this *Action Research* which, as has been frequently mentioned, also represented a micro experience of *formation* and auto-analysis that has been offered to the encountered contexts, may be further refined and used again, thus constituting new situations to be investigated and providing another database.

After all, the present research grew while carrying it out during our encounters with many realities that are in great transition for the most part, despite the remaining presence of much resistance and inability to perceive and experience ongoing transformations, both in academic contexts and in those of formation towards a consecrated Catholic life.

Starting from a reading that is analytical, but more so socio-anthropological and deriving from the study of cultural processes, I will attempt to share a reflection that even surpasses the results of the present research. As far as certain aspects were concerned, the entire experience was also a provocation, a posing of questions that were uncomfortable at times, a suggestion and elaboration of concepts, an initiation of processes. The idea was not – or rather, not just – to gather answers and sediment, record, and codify the contents of thoughts and social actions to be understood and commented later on. We certainly had the aim of bringing out, observing, monitoring and recording reactions, behaviours, discursive modes, and probable consolidated attitudes. However, the transversal objective of the entire investigation was also to strategically pose “some” questions, to help different realities pose them systematically and consciously (*Action Research*) by inducing the restlessness of the questions and the discursive and practical problematic nature of their possible answers...or of the absence of answers (*training*).

As a social and cultural anthropologist, one of my specific investigative activities consisted in gradually observing, monitoring and registering the reactions and processes that were generated. Through an eminently qualitative approach, I constantly took note of the collateral processes of the research while collaborating with the research *équipe* to put precise information-gathering instruments in place. Such instruments enabled the subsequent analysis of more specific data, which were somehow connected to more objective forms of elaboration of the results, and their comparison with the participant observation that I had previously carried out was also interesting.

In this paper I will therefore share both a reflection on the path of “participant observation” that I carried out² in the course of the four years of research, and my own reading, by means of the aforementioned anthropological and sociocultural approach, of the information that was provided through the use of qualitative instruments (i.e., numerous focus groups, very few interviews, and reflections on “critical incidents”) and the use of one more quantitative instrument (i.e., the questionnaire which was structured in 9 languages). Here I will employ a narrative style which, fol-

lowing a dialogical and participative anthropological approach, made me into a participant of the study and an interactive interpreter, inside and beyond the work of an external researcher who reads the data as a detector and analyst of the clashes, divergences and intersections of information.

2

A long participant observation

A disposition of attentive, curious and systematic observation is a substantial and transversal part of an anthropologist's entire work. It starts from the moment scientific "curiosity" emerges; then, when the research project is born, it becomes a precise ethnographic practice through the drafting of a field journal, that is a notebook with notes and annotations.

2.1

A historical premises: the 2007 survey

Nevertheless, I feel the need to make a premise. In truth, I have already worked on matters of multiculturalism in the formation contexts of the Institutes of Consecrated Life (ICL). It was the year 2007, and the experience was centred around a one-day seminar held at the Urbaniana University by our *Istituto Superiore di Catechesi e Spiritualità Missionaria* (ISCSM) in collaboration with the *Faculty of Missiology*. At the time, upon the request of the then-head of the institute, I arranged a brief survey on the perception of the processes of contextualisation and inculturation in the novitiates of female Catholic ICL. About 100 student test subjects, who were female students and women religious attending courses at the ISCSM, were involved. In view of the one-day seminar entitled "*New sprouts, same lymph. The experience of inculturation in novitiates*", which was to take place on March 23rd, 2007, I prepared a brief semi-structured questionnaire in order to start prompting communication on the topic and gather preliminary quantitative and qualitative information. Throughout the seminar, we created and recorded some study focus groups (FG): some of the immediate reports on these FG were shared by their animators during the seminar. During the event I also shared an initial reflection on the data that emerged from the questionnaire which, as mentioned, had previously been administered. The findings of that research were never converted into a scientific article, and I never published the considerations and interpretations that emerged from that work. The sample base was too small and rather connected with the context, and the research instruments, while clearly not banal, were simple, self-produced and unvalidated.

However, regardless of the objective results that emerged from the questionnaire and the various FG, what struck me back then – as in the present research – were the communicative processes: there was a certain distance between perceived reality and narrated reality (or reality that could be narrated), between people's complex experiences, their modes of communication, and the presence of occasionally contradictory evaluations. In the questionnaires, and similarly in the FG, the overwhelming majority of the involved women religious conveyed images of local Catholic churches and related religious congregations characterised by initiated post-colonial processes and with positive contextualisation dynamics. This occurred in the various continental contexts, be them African, Asian, American or Oceanian. At the same time though, it was clearly specified that the founders of the various institutes, most of the current leadership, as well as the contents, materials, structures and personnel that were involved in the formation were of European origin and under European management. As for the question "*The formation experience you have received, in relation to attention towards the novices' cultures of origin, was a) very good, b) good, c) barely sufficient, d) entirely insufficient*", almost all of the attested answers were "a)

very good”³. The questionnaire then concluded with two open questions: 1. *Describe two experiences/situations that occurred during your novitiate demonstrating attention towards your culture of origin that you believe were very positive*, and 2. *Describe two experiences/situations that occurred during your novitiate demonstrating attention towards your culture of origin that you believe were very negative*. These two questions almost always remained unanswered. When they were resumed during the FG they were leading to the same results until some students warned me that the participants did not feel free to speak of the topic due to the presence of some FG animators who, for various reasons, were close to people who could refer what the participants said to their superiors or formators. I therefore called the animators to entrust them with another task and left the FG free to moderate themselves but with the commitment of preparing a detailed and anonymous report of what emerged. The reports presented a different reality compared to the questionnaire: there were indeed some positive practices, which were quite rare in truth; then a greater number of difficult and sometimes painful experiences were narrated, where religious formation was presented as being rather “colonial” and Eurocentric, and therefore often denying or being judgmental towards the non-European women religious’ cultures of origin and incapable of imagining forms of contextualisation and inculturation. Two different worlds and two different narrations emerged, one apparently very ideal and the other sometimes dramatically very real.

I had the distinct impression that for a pluri-continental religious institution like that of the ICL of the Catholic Church, with its widespread and capillary formative structures, the matter of cultural plurality and the diversity of languages, uses, customs and traditions were an accepted fact, yet the ethical and religious (or religious and ethical) need for their positive interaction constantly produced an idealised narration. The statement: «Finding ourselves together in diversity is a nice experience that enables encounters and the exchange of great richness» thus became (and remains to this day) a constant, nice, easily expressible topic that was part of its own habitual narration and self-representation. Multiculturality was (and is) indicated as an opportunity for great exchange in a climate of mutual respect, dialogue and mutual “enrichment”³. Nevertheless, institutional and idealised representation on the one hand, and cultural logics, socioeconomic dynamics, hierarchical and asymmetric relations, and the concrete life of people and institutions on the other hand, may be distant. And I am not referring to the normal gap between ideal and real, between project and concrete realisation. I am also not referring to the classic phenomenon of institutional communication (narration) that diverges from that of the more or less aligned or unsatisfied base. Although the latter is often inevitable, at the time I sensed a specific cultural process, a sort of habit of double narration and double truth: a sort of “environmental hypocrisy” due not so much to a gap between ideal and real that is incommunicable due to reasons of freedom in communication, but rather to an embraced, interiorised and widespread self-representation and consequent idealised narration that stems from the (religious and Christian) nature of the institutions. These in truth are perceived in themselves as “right”, as “good”, regardless of the human contradictions that have always, and in any case, been considered occasional, extemporaneous, and never structural. I will return to this later.

In any case, the 2007 investigation, which would have needed further investigation, remained suspended and unfinished, but various dynamics have reemerged in the present research, which started ten years later. It is as if I had resumed the weaving of the threads of a texture that I had never stopped observing or experiencing while teaching at PUJ and other universities, generally within an ecclesiastical context characterised by the significant presence of subjects from ICL and by decisive internationalism. My later activity in formation and accompaniment in ICL, especially in the missionary area, whose members are increasingly multicultural, was added to this experience.

2.2 The 2017 research

As narrated in the Introduction⁴, about four years ago I was presented with an opportunity to carry out research on a large scale that would open a more capillary exploration of Roman pontifical universities and the numerous formation centres in ICL located in Rome or the province whose members normally attended Roman ecclesiastic academic environments. Collaboration with the “Unione Internazionale delle Superiori Generali” (UISG) and the support of the GHR Foundation made the project feasible and expandable. We could increase the personnel at our disposal by involving collaborators and researchers, and expand into the Italian territory mostly to attain comparison samples that would make what had been found in Rome, which prevailed in terms of the number of institutions that were inserted in the field of investigation, plausible.

Ten years after my first reconnaissance on the dynamics of the inculturation and contextualisation of novitiates, the world of Catholic consecrated life seemed to me to have changed only in part. In this sense, starting right from the phase of elaboration of a possible project to be shared with the UISG and submitted to the GHR Foundation, I made it my business to keep track of notes and annotations. I did it just as much during the phases that followed, and more precisely the phases of personnel selection and training, as well as those of first contact with and involvement of the institutions to be inserted in the research project. The information on the contact modes, different reactions and eventual involvement of various Roman and Italian ecclesiastical institutions of higher education, as well as the various male and female Institutes of Consecrated Life, that I gradually collected could thus be considered “ethnographic notes”. A certain participant observation was also experienced by and with the members of the extended équipe, especially during the meetings of the FG. For each meeting in fact, written notes reporting the observations of both FG facilitators, one of whom explicitly had the role of observing, were gathered. Before proceeding to the interpretation of what emerged from the research’s global data set, I therefore intend to share some considerations on these ethnographic notes.

2.2.1 The contact phase

As already mentioned in the introductory essay of this action-research-training, the analysis and management of multiculturalism and of communication and intercultural education had already been an object of discussion in the world of ICL⁵ for some time and, albeit as a marginal discipline, it was already somewhat a part of the educational offer provided by ecclesiastical university institutions. Nevertheless, the first phase of the project was difficult and entailed the complex task of contacting and engaging various institutions. This phase, which was completed in collaboration with Prof. Longhitano, at that time dean of the ISCSM, and with the executive secretariat of the UISG, led us to contact the superiors of various ICL and the heads or rectors of ecclesiastical institutes of higher education, i.e. mostly universities or pontifical academic institutions. Our attention was clearly only on academic or religious, and congregational or intercongregational, formative communities with a strong degree of multiculturalism among its members. Because we had envisioned our research as an engaging and participative experience (*action-research-training*, as a matter of fact) since the very beginning, it was important for us to gather active and dynamic consensus, and not just formal permission, to meet formators and candidates, students and teachers.

We knew that the matter of multiculturalism was one of the issues that were discussed (and experienced) in such formative realities which, despite being mostly characterised by their reflection on the dimension of “coexistence”, was also increasingly revealing itself to be an “educational emergency”, or a dynamic that concerned both formation to consecrated life and the transmission and true acquisition of the offered contents in university contexts. Each head of (academic or religious

higher) institution that was contacted received a brief presentation of the research and its objectives, of the issues that it stemmed from, and of its methods of implementation and involvement of the communities.

From the onset, I noted my perception of strong resistance in my field journal. The (regional and national) locations of coordination of religious life were formally contacted by e-mail and with an in-person visit during one of their periodic meetings (at the *Unione Superiore Maggiori d'Italia* (USMI), the Lazio regional USMI, the Sicily regional USMI... to give some examples). They then generally provided a formal acceptance of the proposal, to which almost no communication of interest followed, except that expressed by a few superiors or formators (both male and female) who were particularly interested in the phenomenon. In truth, practically no real calls, requests for further information or desire to be engaged occurred. In general, the meetings were characterised by courtesy and respect, coupled with great coldness and silence. This partially explains why very few religious communities were involved in the end, despite there being many ICL and related formative structures throughout the territory, and even this was the result of extensive, patient and reiterated in-person contact. This matter, which seemed to be "so urgent", did not correspond to more than a very difficult and scarce willingness to participate. An ethnographic note is in order here: in the course of this first phase, which required the engagement of the communities in three consecutive meetings (the 3 FG), there was a greater availability of male ICL (Comboni, Consolata Missionary, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate) compared to their female counterparts, which were much more distrustful and usually available only as intercongregational formative communities. Another relevant observation lies in the fact that greater availability was found in strongly missionary congregations. Experience, a missionary perspective, and familiarity with the dimension of encountering diversity probably lowered some defences. And I believe that the fact that the research was supported by the leadership of the PUU (Pontifical University of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples), which is especially familiar with these ICL congregations, also contributed.

As far as universities were concerned, the rectors and heads of ecclesiastical institutions of higher education, including those whose members were part of the *équipe* of researchers, replied in an equally courteous and welcoming manner but generally displayed a certain degree of distrust and struggle in actually cooperating. I personally suppose that there was difficulty on their part in accepting the idea that the real intercultural dynamic present in teaching and institutional organisation could be "read and evaluated" from outside (or inside) such institutions. Perhaps there was also some concern that external or other researchers could investigate the real perception of such a dynamic among teachers and students.

The first form of involvement consisted in a phase of qualitative research by means of batteries of multi-thematic FG composed of three meetings for both students and teachers. In brief, out of the six academic institutions that were involved in the FG phase as regards the teachers, 3 accepted to carry the activity out in 2 meetings, 2 chose the option of 1 meeting and in the biggest institution, i.e. the PUU, only 3 faculties accepted the one-meeting mode, while one faculty, along with the ISCSM, opted for the 2 meetings mode⁶.

The main, and understandable, reason for this, which was also present in the ICL, often lied in the fear of overlapping many activities and initiatives, as well as the desire to protect formators and candidates, as well as students and teachers, from the dispersion and overload of commitments. Another reason for not participating consisted in "having already dealt with the issue", having the matter "already been the object of other meetings, formation sessions and assemblies, etc". I sometimes had the impression that "the matter" was perceived as a topic "to be dealt with, to be discussed..." rather than a process to be monitored, evaluated, promoted, produced, and transformed. It was difficult, and often fruitless, to try to share this second ap-

proach with superiors, formators and teachers in light of a different and new way of considering “the matter”, which is connected less with *coexistence* and more with *formation organisation*. Yet perhaps, in my opinion, it was the very intuition of this horizon that created difficulties for the hierarchical structures of the institutions and formation organisations. In truth, they were supposed to be the subjects who are most interested in the investigative processes and the results of the Action Research that had also been devised as an opportunity and time for self-formation. These institutions were supposed to be the first to eventually achieve a new awareness of reality, initiate transformative processes and guide them. I will return to this topic in the final paragraphs.

Another interesting dynamic consisted in the phase of recruitment and expansion of the research *équipe*, as well as the sharing of the project, its objectives, its possible instruments and the attempt to create a common “language” concerning used terms and their profound understanding. Most of the *équipe* was made up of students and teachers from the same academic institutions that were involved in the action-research-training, and a part belonged to the world of ICL. It was necessary, but also interesting, to work on sharing the project and its “language”, both as a *pre-test* of some instruments and as the beginning of a reflection on the semantic and practical perception of terms such as “multiculturality”, “interculturality”, and “intercultural competences”. There were divergences and different experiences, approaches and ways of thinking within the *équipe* itself that required personal and group discussion and elaboration. It was just as interesting, both during and after the various formation sessions with the *équipe* members, to reflect on the ongoing dynamics and processes related to these dimensions within the realities they were meeting during the research. The presence of researchers from “more secular” contexts also made the confrontation useful both on a comparative level and in relation to the greater awareness of various surrounding contexts.

In brief, if I were to describe what emerged from my field diaries in relation to the first phase of the research with few and significant words, I would say that, both during the qualitative and quantitative phases, the experience of contacting and engaging various realities was characterised by:

For the RESEARCH ÉQUIPE

- *Enthusiasm and sharing of the project and its objectives, but lack of initial clarity regarding the difference between multicultural and intercultural dynamics.* It was important to focus with them on the differences that are present in many multicultural formation contexts in case they presented projects in or attention towards an open and dialogue-based *multicultural*, or paths in view of an *intercultural* dynamic. In other words, the *équipe* also had to reflect on and mature in the (planning, practical and dynamic) differences between the horizon of a welcoming multicultural and that of an interculturality capable of producing mutual transformations. It was just as important for the *équipe* to better understand the existence of specific intercultural competences and of the pondered processes that promote them.
- *Great attention towards the engagement, training in and sharing of the use of participative methods* and of the activation of mutual support towards awareness within an *équipe* that was plural in terms of generations, countries of origin, studied disciplines, academic roles and ecclesiastical contexts.
- *Perception of the experience’s value in terms of self-formation and “multicultural” dialogue* in academic or ICL formative contexts featuring strong cultural plurality.

For the UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

- *Widespread surprise and lack of preparation, as a team of researchers, in elaborating matters concerning the relation between multicultural, interculturality and their own educational offer.* In the course of our first contact with these in-

stitutions and, as we will see later on, in the FG phase, there was a certain degree of unease and lack of preparation in connecting their own disciplinary matters with those of *multi-* and *interculturality*. There was a tendency to see multiculturalism as a dimension (difficulty, disturbance) of didactic transmission, an issue related to addressees and students, and interculturality as a specific matter of certain disciplines.

- *Substantial resistance towards outside observation*⁷. Sometimes the evaluation/self-evaluation was perceived as a time of analysis, collaboration and improvement. Much of the time however, it was perceived as a moment of judgment, and in some cases, of interference in their work. After all, our action-research-training provided *not* for the production of an evaluation report of universities or congregations *but rather* a participative process whose results would have been freely received and employed for further internal processes aiming at the qualification of the experience. This dimension was little grasped and implemented. Furthermore, there was a certain amount of struggle due to the research's being perceived as an experience coming from the bottom and not proceeding in a hierarchical line. It was carried out by a group of university researchers – initially from the PUU, the PFSEA and an international institution (UISG) – and it was open access and therefore not “commanded from above”. The encountered environment seemed to be more accustomed to asymmetrical dynamics.
- *Partial disengagement in taking advantage of the time for collaborative formation*. As mentioned, in the universities and academic institutions that embraced the research/action path it was very difficult to engage teachers in the formation-self-formation activity that had been planned and devised as 3 consecutive meetings in the form of FG. The main reason that was given was the overload of meetings and commitments (as well as lessons), and the perception of this activity as free and not mandatory, i.e. not formally requested by academic authorities. As a result, in the various academic institutions that were involved, the number of teacher FG had to be reduced to two, or even only one, as a minimal condition to maintain at least some participants. Within these “abbreviated solutions” we attempted to summarise the type and content of the investigation without making any substantial changes. Moreover, in the various academic institutions many, and sometimes even most, of the participants who were truly interested in the issue or desirous to demonstrate their presence at these academic initiatives were either not permanent (in the case of invited professors or lecturers) or had only recently been instated. This occurred, with varying numbers, at the PUU, the ITVCC, the IUS, the STI–PIME and the FaTeSi. The contrary occurred in the PFSEA, where the participants had been formally invited: here in fact, there was a majority of permanent teaching staff and less availability on the part of the invited professors (who were not as present at the university). In general, during the teacher FG there was a certain struggle in carrying out the *peer-to-peer* self-formation experience, and at times the questions of the FG seemed to be aimed more at “judging” (evaluating) the work of the teachers rather than analysing the situation together; at other times, there were questions as to whether a superior institute was organising the research.

The dynamic of hierarchical processes seems to be strongly perceived in Catholic ecclesiastical contexts, but the situation differs in universities and formation communities of consecrated life. The former initially embraced the chance to host the research but presented difficulties when it came to really engaging students and teachers. The latter generally ignored the invitation to participate and closed themselves to a prospect of reading that was animated from outside; however, the few who accepted the proposal were seriously and more collaboratively engaged.

STUDENTS

- *More extensive but problematic involvement of students.* It was also difficult to involve students, despite their participation being volunteer and sample-based, in the attempt to form only a few FG for each academic institution, each composed of 14 members⁸. For the most part, these meetings were seen as an extra hourly commitment in addition to the students' various university commitments, and in some cases an investigation that could highlight something – i.e. multiculturalism – that was evident in the composition of the student body but not to the same extent in that of the academic organisation, languages, dominant cultures and course programmes, was viewed with suspicion. Like in the brief 2007 survey, I sensed the perplexity of many students concerning the researchers' real desire to listen to the truth and the students' practical possibility to express opinions, including critical ones, as well as little belief that anything could really change. *There was more participation in institutions where the researchers made a greater effort to explain the aims, contents and procedures of the research*, as well as where there were teachers who were "more sensitive" towards the research and acted as mediators. In these cases, it was easier to illustrate an activity that would enable the lights and shadows of the ongoing experience to be narrated and lead to reflections on desirable future transformations. In cases where the university population was mixed in terms of gender, the female component was more participative. Those who participated in the FG generally expressed their satisfaction upon having the opportunity to speak more extensively about certain topics. Despite the diversity in experience and competences (with very different languages) students faithfully partook in the proposals that were presented at the 3 meetings.

For the ICL FORMATION COMMUNITY FORMATORS

- *Difficulties in self-analysis on the part of formators.* The formators to consecrated life who were called on to carry out interviews and not to form FG, somehow manifested dynamics that were similar to those of the university teaching staff. Not many interviews were carried out because only a few formation communities accepted to be involved in the end. Yet this was not the only reason. While courtesy, collaboration and the willingness to meet characterised our contact with such formators, much less willingness to undergo an in-depth interview was displayed. Where this did occur, multiculturalism was perceived as a dimension "of others", i.e. of the candidates, and as dealing more with "their" dynamics of coexistence and community. In few cases did the discussion manage to mostly approach their way of being and acting as formators, the dynamic of the formative proposal, or matters related to the charisma and forms of religious life (which are mostly centred, on a categorical and substantial level, in cultures with a European matrix). In fact, it was difficult to explore how the entire formative framework is rooted in anthropological, social and religious categories with a "Western" matrix on a psycho-pedagogical and spiritual theological level.

It is possible to notice how this dimension somehow emerges in contrast with the extensive documentation that has been gathered on ICL and their reflection on *multi-* and *interculturality* compared to the reiterated claims of the importance and current relevance of the issue, as well as with the "culture" of attention towards multiculturalism that has been expressed based on the recent past of the various congregations (especially missionary ones) that joined the research⁹. Nevertheless, the somewhat defensive statements "we have already dealt with these things", or "we have already held meetings on this topic", often recurred.

CANDIDATES

- *Serious and continuous involvement of ICL candidates.* The participation of consecrated men and women in the various formation houses (first by means of the sample FG, and then in an extensive manner with the questionnaire) was generally very consistent. In their case as well, their adherence to the FG was on a voluntary basis. The decisional process of these smaller realities with closer relationships resulted in more consistent and dynamic participation compared to that of the academic institutions. Such meetings were, for the most part, considered an extra – albeit interesting – hourly commitment by the consecrated men and women and allowed them to escape their routine of community commitments.

2.2.2 A further statistical annotation

It must be pointed out that the few formative ICL communities that signed up for the qualitative phase and were mostly from missionary congregations, were backed by formators, formation programmes, but especially by candidates that were rather open and favourable towards the contents of the research and the group dialogue approach. A further reflection is in order here: as previously mentioned, in the *qualitative phase* of the research, there was greater availability within the male communities, while more closure emerged in the female communities. However, it is necessary to point out that it was the heads and formators of the “female communities”, and not the communities themselves, that expressed greater closure and acted as filters of the experience. In contrast, during the *quantitative phase*, there was less involvement on the part of the male participants and greater availability within the female part, since the Questionnaire was open access and *online*.

Considering that the quantitative phase of the research (the administration of the online Questionnaire) mostly took place within the academic institutions, the following brief reflections may be useful: 81.9% of those who completed the Questionnaire were diocesan priests, seminarians or consecrated men and women. The latter, i.e. the consecrated men and women, made up 68.4% of the compilers. It is interesting to see how 71.6% of the number of people who filled in the Questionnaire were female. Considering that 13.4% of the total were diocesan priests and seminarians, and that 18.1% were male and female laypersons, it is easy to infer that most of the consecrated men and women who filled in the Questionnaire were “consecrated women”¹⁰. This data assumes even more value upon observing – even merely as an example – the related numbers (Table 1) and absolute numbers (Table 2) of the students of 4¹¹ of the universities or higher education institutes where the Questionnaire was distributed in 2021 (corresponding to 75.8% of the institutions that answered the Questionnaire¹²).

Tab. 1 – Percentage of distribution of the Q participants among the academic ecclesiastical institutions*

| Participating academic institutions | Percentage |
|---|------------|
| Pontificia Università Urbaniana (Rome) | 38.4% |
| Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium (Rome) | 25.6% |
| Istituto Universitario Sophia (Florence) | 6.0% |
| Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata Claretianum (Rome) | 5.8% |
| Pontificia Università Salesiana (Rome) | 5.1% |
| Seminario Teologico Internazionale – PIME (Monza, Milan) | 3.4% |
| Other university institutions | 15.7% |
| Total | 100.0% |

* Only institutions with a % above 3% were listed.

Tab. 2 – Absolute number of teachers and students present in the academic ecclesiastical institutions in the three academic years in which the action-research-training took place*

| Academic Year | | Italian teachers | European teachers (non-Italian) | Non-European teachers | Students | Males | Females |
|---------------|-------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----------|-------|---------|
| | PUU | | | | | | |
| 2018/2019 | | 83 | 19 | 23 | 1396 | 1094 | 302 |
| 2019/2020 | | 76 | 12 | 21 | 1240 | 929 | 311 |
| 2020/2021 | <i>Covid19 Pandemic</i> | 72 | 12 | 21 | 1286 | 1046 | 240 |
| | PFSEA | | | | | | |
| 2018/2019 | | 41 | 2 | 8 | 356 | 37 | 319 |
| 2019/2020 | | 42 | 3 | 9 | 346 | 32 | 314 |
| 2020/2021 | <i>Covid19 Pandemic</i> | 47 | 3 | 13 | 459 | 54 | 405 |
| | ITVCC | | | | | | |
| 2018/2019 | | 28 | 8 | 7 | 173 | 18 | 155 |
| 2019/2020 | | 29 | 10 | 8 | 167 | 11 | 156 |
| 2020/2021 | <i>Covid19 Pandemic</i> | 30 | 8 | 7 | 151 | 12 | 139 |
| | IUS | | | | | | |
| 2018/2019 | | 32 | 10 | 4 | 123 | 58 | 65 |
| 2019/2020 | | 28 | 8 | 5 | 128 | 67 | 61 |
| 2020/2021 | <i>Covid19 Pandemic</i> | 34 | 7 | 8 | 164 | 81 | 83 |
| | STI-PIME ¹³ | | | | | | |
| 2018/2019 | | 27 | – | – | 41 | 35 | 6 |
| 2019/2020 | | 27 | – | – | 54 | 48 | 6 |
| 2020/2021 | <i>Covid19 Pandemic</i> | 29 | – | – | 74 | 53 | 21 |

* **Source:** the didactic secretariats of the academic institutions. The FaTeSi in Palermo is absent, as it did not send the data, but its percentage of compiled Questionnaires was not significant.

It is interesting to see, upon observing only A.Y. 2020/2021 in Table 2, how the significant number of women that filled in the Questionnaire (71.6%) cannot be accounted for based on the majority of female students in the PFSEA and ITVCC (which combined still make up 31.4% of the total number of compilers), since the vast majority of participants in the PUU and the STI-PIME are male. At the IUS, the number of male and female students is even. The interweaving of this data leads to the conclusion that the Questionnaire has mostly been the object of interest of women and not men (why? I will advance a hypothesis later), and that most of them are probably consecrated women that attended the PUU and PFSEA institutions.

3

A comparative analysis of the framework presented by the Focus groups and Questionnaire

I do not wish to repeat what has already been illustrated in the preceding contributions¹⁴, yet it is important for me to have them in mind, read them and go through

them from a comparative perspective. Therefore, I will add my analysis of the gathered data and information to what has already been detailed and share a series of conclusive reflections. I will try to do so in a schematic manner by indicating the “thought-provoking” critical points and aspects that emerged during our four years of listening, working, reflecting and comparing.

3.1 The main subject of our research: female, member of an ICL, who crosses different worlds

In the working hypothesis of our research, we started from the perception that, in these worlds so marked by multiculturalism (pontifical and ecclesiastical university institutions and ICL formative communities) there were different levels of awareness in relation to the terms and dynamics at play: everyone perceives multiculturalism, but what value do they give it? Do they know the specific meaning of the intercultural dynamic? Do they confuse it with the former? Do they know what an “intercultural competence” is? Do the people who experience this immersion in cultural plurality perceive the competences that they already possess and exercise as well as those they should develop? Do the (academic or of formation to consecrated life) formative institutions promote and form them in a conscious and systematic manner? The (provisional) answers to these questions stemmed from research in the field and the rereading of textual data and of that deriving from the completion of the questionnaires. The units of analysis were different, the sample mostly came from the complex and multifaceted reality in Rome, and the information received from the various control units (formative faculties, communities and locations that differed from the Roman institutions) substantially confirmed a perceptive and practical dynamic that is similar in the analysed samples. However, there is a “key subject” that emerged throughout the entire process and constituted about 70% of the studied sample base: consecrated women between 25 and 55 years of age, mostly from Africa and Asia but with relevant percentages of European (especially Italian) and Latin American members. This is the “woman belonging to an ICL” who crosses different cultural worlds for the mission and her formation, and who constitutes almost 50% of the participants of the FG and more than 70% of those who completed the Questionnaire or were involved in the completion of other provided instruments of investigation (intercultural survey form and analysis of critical incidents)¹⁵.

Why is there such an imbalance towards women? The population, both female and male, that was contacted and involved throughout the various stages of the research had been carefully selected. We could actually say that the majority of the population that received the invitation to participate in the research was sometimes mostly constituted by a male point of contact (e.g. in the PUU). Nevertheless, men, be them already priests or on the path of formation towards diocesan or religious Catholic priesthood, more frequently withdrew from the research. In academic institutions or formative events featuring a mixed participation (male and female), even when the male component represented the absolute and abundant majority of the population, it composed the relative and scarce majority of those who joined the FG, and a clear minority of those who compiled the Questionnaire. Among the ICL communities in Italy that were called to fill in the Questionnaire, only the female congregations responded sporadically¹⁶. Is reflection on the practices of multiculturalism and interculturalism only a female matter? Is the “potentiation of” and “formation towards” intercultural competences only a path for women? Is welcoming others in their cultural diversity and caring for relations a “feminine thing” while men do not cede, defend their identity and culture¹⁷, and avoid entering problematising discussions? Or are we in the presence of a more complex attitude which, beyond these hypothetical simplifications and generalisations, is connected to the phenomenon of “clericalism”¹⁸ in the Catholic Church, meant as a form of separation, authority, lack of dia-

logue, and disdain towards investigations from below? The doubt that the priest or he who studies as such (in Rome, in particular), could aim at reaching a status (and socioeconomic position) of authority rather than dedicate himself (with passion and effort) to meeting and confronting the world and its complexity, emerges. It is easy to think that he may – not only but mostly – be destined to future teaching or governing¹⁹ roles (especially if involved in higher education abroad) rather than those based on animation, dialogue, understanding and the participative construction of basic realities. In contrast, female candidates seem to be better suited for dialogue from below and for the horizon of missionary activity, pastoral animation and service in the territory that are characterised by cultural, religious and socioeconomic pluralism, especially in missionary contexts. Only a partial divergence compared to these very general hypotheses emerged from the male religious missionary world: however, as we already know, it mainly participated in the qualitative part of the research. In any case, these are open reflections. There is still much to investigate in further depth.

3.2 Disturbances in the perception of key terms: multiculturalism, interculturality, intercultural competences

In the various units of analysis, different ways to perceive, interpret, and therefore manage cultural plurality and its consequences appear. Here as well, the matter of the perception/interpretation of cultural diversity leads to the emergence of other problematic points. These also concern the difference between *leadership* and the base, among formators and candidates.

As in the reflection that was shared in the preceding paragraph regarding the numerical differences between male and female participants in the research that opened a possible window onto the matter of clericalism in the Catholic Church, now, upon discussing multiculturalism, another window opens on the way university education and, to the same extent, “educational and formative processes” in general, should be understood. I will therefore proceed by unit of analysis and briefly share what, in my opinion, emerged from the observation and analysis of the data.

ECCLESIASTICAL UNIVERSITIES AND ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

Teachers/Students

In the context of academic education, upon listening to the *teachers*, the perception of university education as an event of unidirectional communication that is characterised more by the transmission and consequent possible acquisition of content than by the qualification and learning of competences (including cognitive ones) and critical abilities prevails. The matter of multiculturalism is thus mostly seen as a typological *context* of the base of recipients of the transmission/transfer operation of content. In cases where the origin of the candidates is plural, the main problem (for the transmission of content) is, in fact, a linguistic one (in the dimension of code more than of semantics): technically, it is “a disturbance” of efficient transmission. Space is little or rarely given to the conscious and critical perception of the multiculturalism of the teachers themselves, who self-perceive themselves (or perhaps only narrate themselves as such in public) as having transited with sufficient “integration” to “Western” culture and the Italian language. Even less space is dedicated to the matter of the mono, multi and/or intercultural dimension of disciplinary contents. Therefore, while multiculturalism is mostly a problematic fact characterising students (and mainly a linguistic problem), the multiculturalism/interculturality dynamic as disciplinary content is generally perceived as a “topic” to be treated in certain specific subjects, and not a transversal, and thus transdisciplinary, element. It is transversal in the background of the formators, as of the candidates, but also of the educational offer (contents and programmes). In any case, interculturality, as Deriu²⁰ rightfully points out, is not perceived as the responsibility of the teacher,

who is called upon to transmit his or her specific discipline (of which, I repeat, the mainly Western contextual and cultural aspect is rarely seen). Even the comparison with other teachers from other continental contexts is only a vague hypothesis that is indicated theoretically: we are in Italy, in Europe, with an age-old Christian tradition, and this indicates the main cultural horizon of reference without it needing to be reiterated. The “others”, or the other teachers with different cultural backgrounds are basically called upon – albeit with mutual respect – to approach and integrate within a formal, thus enriching confrontation and tolerant dialogue. Those who belong to this “other” origin tend to (finally) be able to speak about it but do so with great humility and without great demands.

During the teacher FG, the sincerity of some – although few – teachers in sustaining that they had never considered “the matter”, and that these are questions they had never asked themselves, is striking. Others, on the contrary, assume the topic as being inside their way of acting and thinking as a teacher in a multicultural context of teachers and students, but then only give examples about the adaptation or the possible and difficult “translation” of content for “the others”, the recipients, and narrate teaching as unidirectional transmission. It is usually the non-Italian or non-European teachers who present competent reflections on the matters at play in terms of the meanings and forms of thoughts in disciplinary content, but they do so in a marginal and discreet manner.

In these stories, Europe often appears as an academic and scientific world that, being unique, developed or was the main motor of the human or religious sciences²¹. The existence of other continental contexts with a cultural and disciplinary heritage that is just as historical, be it similar or different, is not, little, or not relevantly perceived. For some teachers, this self-referential “ethno(Euro)-centric position” seems to have been enacted and experienced but not conscious. For others, this position is conscious and experienced with a certain degree of discomfort but betrays a lot of circumspection, introjection, or something that it is not really the case to talk about. It is worth noting that the Italian teachers mostly favoured narrations where it is the *other* (new teacher and especially student) who encounters difficulties with what he or she finds and receives during the didactic event (language, lessons, theoretical frameworks, exams). It is “they” who do not understand and need to be helped or guided to understand. Multicultural attention consists in taking on the task of helping them to adapt and integrate.

It is the teachers of foreign origin who most often report their own acculturative difficulties, as well as the awareness that the *other* (teacher and especially student) may experience the same. It is underlined that such difficulties do not derive from “not understanding”, but rather from the cultural inconvenience of “difference”, or in other words from seeing something that has been understood in a different manner. However, these considerations are narrated in a discreet manner, so as to not really “touch” upon the sensitivity of the dominant cultural horizon.

All this leads to the emergence, along with the rarity and vagueness of seriously focused reflection on postcolonial and intercultural processes, of the prevalent educational model. Although an extensive bibliography on learning processes and didactic methodology has been built over the decades, and although we may speak today of many innovative matters and modes²², a mostly deductive model and a form of teaching that is mostly based on frontal and unidirectional dynamics still prevail. They are based on contents presented as discursive/rational elements that the candidate must listen to/understand, comprehend/interiorise and, if and when possible or required, choose and translate into behavioural practices. For this reason, the main problem lies in “the language”, i.e. the code chosen for the data transmission. The imagined sequence that learning must undergo follows this path: ear / eye → brain → “heart” (in a metaphorical sense: appreciation / desire / choice / willingness) action / body → world.

Therefore, without entering the psycho-pedagogical and neuropsychological matters underlying the plausibility or bias of this imagined process, in our case “multi-

culturality” is mostly transformed into a matter of linguistic diversity and “interculturality and the related socio-relational competences” become a “topic” (content/discourse) to be made into the subject of lessons or conferences, as well as workshops to explore a “topic”. It is not a matter (it is almost never understood as being the matter) of complete educational objectives, actions of collaborative learning, theoretical/practical and relational competences, alternative semantic approaches to content and teaching methods, etc. From a unidirectional perspective with resulting in-person teaching, the only problem (when present) lies in the inconvenience that arises when the used linguistic code is not “understood” (correctly decoded and memorised). Furthermore, if it is understood, the cultural (non-linguistic) mediations are generally the responsibility of the candidate or may be facilitated by means of a comparative path that is provided by the teacher or created by the student. The problem, therefore, is not only the matter of understanding multiculturalism, interculturality and intercultural competences, but also the awareness of and real willingness to transform the formative model. However, the topic is wider than what our research sought to study, and further in-depth analyses of the second meeting of the focus groups could lead to the emergence of other aspects.

The male and female *students* enacted an approach that was partly similar to and partly different from the topic. When inserted into a frontal formative system having the aim of acquiring content (by means of discursive activities), the linguistic matter remains the main means of detecting diversity with teachers and students; after all, it is also the normal first communicative link and gate among people of different origins. Nevertheless, in comparison to the teachers’ discussions, which mostly make the problem of misunderstanding and distance emerge, male and female students are more creative and positive: they highlight the value of even sporadic attempts of teachers’ and students’ *cross-cultural* action. They are *cross-cultural* because it is important to underline the intermediate steps going from multiculturalism towards interculturality, which are attempts to go across and to overcome one’s own position, and in some way tip the balance towards the other. Such a (more or less themed and more or less aware) maturation of one’s intercultural competences, as well as those of others’, may be seen in students (upon going through the FG’ materials and the results of the Questionnaire²³) as something that grows with time: the time spent in Italy, the years of living in multicultural religious congregations, the years of pastoral mission in different geographical contexts, and finally the years spent attending universities, faculties or academic institutions. One’s own discomfort towards language (and/or the culture of the other) and the perception of the discomfort of others towards one’s own language and culture decrease – as it is feasible, but not obvious, to think – in function of one’s own experience of diversity. Cultural shock may in fact sediment and exacerbate the discomfort of people and their communities, yet a trend of adaptation and gradual solution emerges in general. The educational and formative institutions that consciously detect the resources and problematic areas of a multicultural context should therefore facilitate processes or prevent inconveniences within an experiential and qualifying, and not discursive, logic. One of the questions that animated the second meeting of the FG was devised in this sense: “2.2. Thinking of your formation in the context in which you were inserted, *what type of proposals* are made by those who animate and direct such an environment in order to promote *multicultural attention and interactions*? Briefly describe them”. The students indicated some efforts that were made by the academic institutions, but not great commitment. I will only report three statements that briefly describe what emerged in many FG:

«A specific proposal no, maybe promoting a nice environment, some time to work together, this could already be a way...but something specific to know, to share, to accept the culture of others, that...no...» (A, FG 2, 26/11/2018)

«...there are professors who give tasks according to research, according to one's own country, and sometimes there are those who even give the opportunity to share one's own experience, but it is not aimed at promoting interculturality, but rather to make people's culture known...» (A, FG 2, 26/11/2018)

«...we are all foreigners because there are almost no Italians. For this reason, there is a certain degree of sensibility, and then also some professors, but this depends on the professor, who sometimes give us the chance to exchange thoughts "speak for 5 minutes in small groups, say what you think, how this works in your country, in your congregation, in your country". Perhaps some professors are more sensitive...also the fact that the professors themselves are from different cultures... This also helps in this sensibility, (...) then yes, there are courses. Last year there was a course just on interculturality held by professor ***. He is Congolese and a specialist. So yes, I have the impression that this is important for the institute, not everything works well but in any case there is awareness and also an effort to help the academic community» (C, FG 2, 04/12/2018).

The analysis of this second FG was carried out by Fiorenza Deriu²⁴ using the *IramuteQ software* but not by the other researchers, who used MAXQDA 2020. It could therefore be further investigated in depth. In general, even the simple reading and discursive analysis of the recordings highlight the episodic dimension of the formation proposal, which is connected to the teacher's personality and mostly in the linguistic or merely occasional and representative/folkloristic horizon of cultural diversity. They usually consist in irregular and not planned "facilitating" activities for students rather than the assumption of cultural plurality (on a disciplinary and interdisciplinary level) with regard to the formation proposal, with the exception of some specific courses (cultural anthropology, intercultural communication, intercultural pedagogy, interreligious dialogue). In any case, the horizon is that of multiculturalism and never appears, on a substantial level, as interculturality.

ICL FORMATIVE COMMUNITIES: *Formators/Candidates*

In the context of ICL formative communities, a certain vagueness on the topic is striking upon analysing mainly the material of the few interviews to *formators* (7) but also the contact, observation, and formal and informal dialogue with other formators that had not been interviewed formally but met during the creation of the FG. Clearly, the database for such an analysis is small and reflects the specific and personal experience and competence of few people. Nevertheless, some things recur and are mirrored in what has been said and indicated by the candidates.

During the interviews with some of the *ICL formators* (one Brazilian, one Eritrean, four Italians, and one Spanish whose congregations or missionary institutes are generally mostly composed of African or Asian members) various moments were dedicated to the matter of interculturality. When asked about the differences between multiculturalism and interculturality, some of them answered as follows:

«I am a bit embarrassed. It (*our institute – Note by editors*) is definitely multicultural. I believe that interculturalism is when there is an exchange among cultures, in other words one takes advantage of the other's culture. This is what I understood, but honestly I must say that you caught me off guard. It's not...I have never thought of it, I have to be honest. But I think a bit of interculturality as the advantage that one takes of the culture of another, or of the enrichment that one gains from the culture of another. That's what I think, I may be wrong» (V., 24.11.2018).

«...I would not know how to define them, I would not be able to exactly tell you the difference now because even now, when they ask us.... so what are you.... we are, we speak of internationality and interculturality and our congregation is formed by interculturality and multiculturality» (T., 29.03.2019).

«...we reflected as an institute, and this is the booklet that was published after the meeting that they had and... but... we are lacking in continuity, so we have this meeting and then it seems that the topic is done, although important things were underlined in that meeting, but it is a reflection that it is not finished at all, it is a reflection that it should be carried forth, and instead once this meeting is done it is forgotten» (J., 24.11.2018).

«Multiculturalism, I imagine some monolithic students from Africa or Chile, for example, that bring their nation like a...how do you call it, container. So when they later go on a mission everyone wants to be Chilean in Peru, Colombian in Peru and so naturally where does the encounter take place? We go down parallel roads. And interculturality instead? Instead interculturality, I see that everyone comes with their own, their baggage, but the baggage is open, so they pull out their own best, but also their own worst sometimes, and share it with the others so there is a comparison. From this comparison something new, something that is not really local could be born but it is, well...not placed among the clouds, but it is human...in other words, it is different, richer» (C., 29.03.2019).

«I believe that multiculturalism is... I don't know... as if the other cultures were... one in front of the other, they can be juxtaposed, I'm not really sure, like an archipelago, or in search of an exchange, each is not an unconnected island, but by speaking, communicating, like with bridges, it remains a nucleus... but various influences then pass» (A., 06.04.2019).

The way in which the formator is called to transmit the values of the “charisma” of his or her ICL and the solidity of religious life to educate in the “*character*” and human dimension of behaviours and attitudes, to help each on the path towards common life (all perceived as if it were a value in itself, with its own strength, a-cultural) thus emerges. He or she feels called to this. Cultural plurality, instead, is a background variable that is added as a “specific mode”, on the candidates’ part, of being, perceiving oneself, perceiving others and behaving. It may be richness, in the sense of appreciation of pluralism, or, and more simply, a “disturbance” with regard to communication and socialising. However, the centre is generally occupied by the person (interpreted according to European categories...), not the matter of cultural difference.

As far as multiculturalism and interculturality are concerned, there are vague ideas and only sometimes is the reflection more profound; “common”, simplified perceptions prevail. Multiculturalism is perceived in a “divisionist” sense, and where there are cultural diversities, each normally seeks to live or survive according to one’s own mentality and one’s own uses and customs without wanting to impose them on others and without wanting to be transformed by those of others. Interculturality is “when there is exchange”, “mutual enrichment” (the topic of culture diversity as a set of “things” that one is and has and “exchanges”). The two concepts, while somewhat plausible, are however perceived in their extreme and simplified form. The problem for formators – due to their action and the communitarian life of the candidates – emerges when one passes from reflections that are a bit theoretical to the planning and managing of community life as well as that of religious and missionary formation: what does this “exchange” mean? How does it occur? Based on what does it take place? Based on what can exchange and negotiation not take place? Who decides it? By means of which cultural categories is the exchange managed?

Who animates or promotes it? What does enriching oneself of the “values” or the traditions of another culture exactly mean? How are they stably inserted into the “culture” of the recipient? How do they transform it? Into what? Generally, there is silence in the face of these questions. What has been shared by the formators seems more to be a way of “organising” community life in a non-conflictual and tolerant manner than dealing with the matters of learning and understanding charisma and the human person within a plural, hybrid and intercultural perspective. Such an interpretative and practical “perspective” of plurality, hybridisation and intercultural contamination and transformation is a distant topic (while it is what actually happens daily and slowly). The consideration of diversity as plurality and of interculturality as, at the most, mutual enrichment, prevail. Then, as we mentioned, the way in which the exchange occurs and what it changes within a person is not really clear. It is preferred to “believe” and not explore the image of a sedimentation of experiences that accumulate and “enrich”. The rest of the work focuses, on one hand, on the inclusive respect of cultural plurality in communities (food, some marginal habits, songs, certain liturgical aspects, the language at times), and on the other hand, on the possibility of occasionally expressing and representing diversity within a mainly folkloristic horizon.

«...we have a day... then there are also others, throughout the year...for example, if there is the Independence Day of Congo, we have a small party. Then they speak about their country, they explain what they do in their country to the others. There is a Kenyan national holiday, they prepare a little something and talk a bit to the others about the country, about Kenya, about the challenges they face there. No, in that they are fairly open, they also know a bit about the things they also have in other countries, especially the Africans...» (J., 24.11.2018)

By the way, this entirely European attitude of repeatedly giving a specific name to those who come from different countries (they are referred to as Chileans, Indians, Chinese, Poles, Italians, Americans – referring improperly only to US citizens) is surprising, as is that of speaking about “Africans” indiscriminately to refer to those (for the most part with black skin) coming from the different and numerous countries and cultural contexts of Africa. Moreover, within the perspective of inclusive cultural plurality, a problem is sometimes reported when one ethnic or national or cultural group prevails on the others. Usually, phenomena that have already been seen (but are still widespread) of Eurocentrism in language, lifestyle and ways of religious experience are repeated, but this time from an African or Asian perspective. In an interview, an example of a community that is unbalanced towards Africa is narrated, along with the resulting Africanisation of its uses and customs (schedules, food, “exaggerated” sense of privacy), that creates problems even if it does not seem to be “an enormous difficulty” for those who are in a minority position (Italians, Europeans, Latin Americans, Asians). Interestingly, the phenomenon of the current prevalence of “vocations” from continents other than the traditional European or Western ones has been solved, for instance, not by implementing a now-necessary formation of all subjects – formators and candidates – towards intercultural competences for the management of multicultural communities, but rather through facilitating strategies to shorten distances by choosing formators who are capable of adaptation or mediation.

«In choosing the formators, due to the irreparably African imprint that our seminary has taken on, people from Africa or with experience of positive encounters with Africa who are capable of “adapting” here... mmmm adapting perhaps... is really the wrong word.» (V., 24.11.2018)

«...as regards the matter of intercultural formation, I would not make a new proposal. It's enough to...listen to, look, appreciate one another. I would not do anything new compared to what has been attempted... Each person has a culture, a way of living, thinking, acting, relating inside that are fundamental values and when one can.... listen to, feel, appreciate what is in the other person, that is good for me... I don't know, I don't have anything else to add.» (V., 24.11.2018).

Without commenting the reference to the “*irreparably African*” imprint of the seminary at hand, it truly seems that the topic of *intercultural competences* is the great absentee. For the formators that we encountered, multiculturalism is a “fact” that they perceive and seek to face: they have experienced it and developed a certain competence in the course of their personal story (as missionaries from one part of the world who are sent to another part) and in their current formation service. The understanding of interculturality usually does not go beyond the promotion of a mutually welcoming environment and of occasional exchange, and it struggles to go beyond conflict management. However, the specific competences and related qualifying paths aimed at living in cultural plurality and managing intercultural transitions are not part of the formative horizon. Neither the formators nor the candidates are generally accompanied in perceiving and managing their own cultural transformation and contamination: they are an absent topic or the product of a personal path. The formative horizon is mostly based on the reinforcement of relational and communicative human qualities to be enhanced through choice, exercise, patience and the support of a religious and spiritual ideal horizon.

A *gap* emerges between formators and *candidates*. With the appropriate exceptions, the various phases of the research and the results that emerged from the analysis of the texts and the data of the questionnaire present a certain distance that is not only generational, between the formators (even when they are teachers) and the candidates, in relation to the perception of multiculturalism, personal experiences of crossing into and settling in different geographic and cultural contexts, and the possibility of elaborating and promoting intercultural experiences.

Upon rereading the discussions that emerged within the various FG and the data of the Questionnaire, and comparing them with the reflections of Deriu, Deliu and Di Censi, I can hereby sustain that the unit of analysis that was grasped by the candidates seemed to be open to the dynamics of interculturality, even if it is still not well prepared.

While for the former (formators and teachers), as well as for the latter (students and candidates) multiculturalism is a fact pertaining to the reality in which the formative experience takes place, for the candidates it is so with greater awareness also in the reality they came from or in which they carried out their ecclesiastical service. Upon analysing the texts of the FG and many answers of the questionnaire, we can claim that the candidates *make memories out of “their” experience of multiculturalism*, as opposed to many formators who speak of the experience of “others”. Clearly, the data on teachers and formators is smaller: it was limited to few interviews (and the teacher FG) where the role of formators and formation was dealt with more directly. Nevertheless, the overall perception is that of a greater presence, in candidates, of reading multiculturalism and “intercultural competences” that have been experimented and/or acquired in the field. Clearly, there is no lack of lights and shadows: students and members of ICL often analyse their own cultural *background* and that of others, as well as the encounter that can take place with poor, simplistic and inadequate instruments²⁵. Other times, also due to the lack of other formation proposals, the multicultural exchange is limited to matters of language, diversity of food, some social behaviours and ways of organising festivities and “ethnic” self-representations. However, there is no lack of reflections and sharing which, on the contrary, are carried out

with human and cultural competence and require training the formators to face the challenge of interculturality, of the *inter*-culturation of the disciplines and charisms of ICL, of teaching and formation methods, etc. As Di Censi²⁶ well underlines, the increase in formation entails an increase in the ability to analyse and understand other cultures and one's own culture as a dynamic process by trying to sense paths that favour the encounter and relationship of mutual transformation. It is only by being accompanied²⁷, and in a climate of dialogue and comparison with planned and solid formation experiences, that one senses in which way it is possible to go beyond the horizon of mere "enrichment" by sedimentation/juxtaposition. It is only thanks to a conscious and intentional formation that one competently faces the fear that the other (or the plural or global context) can transform us. Only good personal and group formation may help each member and the formative institutions participate as a protagonist and be aware of (inter)cultural transition. The horizon of formation seems to be the way to go.

4

Challenges to embrace and necessary transformations

As a matter of fact, in light of what has been experienced, understood and shared throughout these four years, I can say that the horizon of a formation that helps the comprehension and management of multiculturalism is no longer deferrable or relegated to occasional "thematic" exploration, unless it is done by means of occasional workshops based on sharing and animation. I believe that such formation must take on three important challenges:

- a. to be included in higher university formation and entrance in ICL as one of the curricular contents and a mandatory qualification along with others and within fertile and critical interaction with other contents, abilities and competences; curricular contents and qualifications, devised in terms of educational objectives, from the perspective of the candidate's level and degree of learning, and not of the "topics" faced (or, in other words, transmitted) by formators.
- b. to be devised, planned and experienced in a participative manner, thus engaging formators and candidates as interlocutors and bearers of experience and competence and not, especially in the case of the latter, only as the recipients of the formative event;
- c. to be founded on the critical and conscious assumption of the desire to overcome some conceptual and experiential "knots" that impede progress in the formation towards intercultural competences. Such knots are indicated below and have been a motif underlying the main cognitive concerns of our research: 1. culture as a "thing" and not a process, 2. dialogue-based and inclusive multiculturalism as a dangerous synonym of interculturality and 3. the discursive, didactic, occasional approach in formation towards interculturality in multicultural contexts.

4.1 Culture, multiculturalism, interculturality, cultural...

A conceptual knot and a substantial and "objectified" idea of culture persists in the minds of many teachers and formators²⁸: it lies between static, monolithic and stereotyped perceptions ("us/them", "my culture is...", "those who come from... are like this", etc.) and more dynamic positions that still make culture into a sort of "innatism", "imprinting" or profound attitude, something that is in fact acquired but learnt once and for all and determines a person. As a result, *multiculturalism* is thought to be an experience of juxtaposition of differences that is changeable for the most part, and *interculturality* the context where some are more capable of transporting "pieces" of

their own or others' "culture" in themselves and others. "Cultural" coincides with "typical", determining, connotative of a geographic area, a human group (at times defined as an "ethnicity"), a religious group or, in general, a part of the population that is connoted at a linguistic and/or sociocultural level. Therefore, each communicative and cognitive operation occurs through narration, representation and, if necessary, the "cognitive" learning of differences, with the resulting control and psychosocial management of the behaviours and feelings that are triggered by the relation, especially if the latter is characterised by proximity. Candidates are also somewhat bearers of this mentality, either due to the "mirror" effect with formative communities and adults of reference, or because it is also widespread in their contexts of origin. After all, they do not want to lose a concept that is self-referential, stable and reassuring in terms of identity and cultural identity.

We may think of "cultural identity" as a reality, as something that really exists inside and outside of us, in others... or we can think of it as "a speech", i.e. an ideological, cognitive and interpretative process that is useful for the management of the self with others while remaining a provisional, procedural, relational element. Psychologists, social psychologists, sociologists, and especially cultural anthropologists²⁹ have been defining it so for decades with multi and interdisciplinary attention.

Everything that nourishes and builds the perception and the sense of self of the answer to the question "*who am I*" on a psychological and sociocultural level inevitably emerges when we find ourselves before an "*other*", and it never says what we are... but what we are with others and also thanks to others. Identity, which is literally something that remains stable and similar to itself at least for a certain amount of time, is the mental category, the framework that men use to define (and try to at least psychologically control) that which in truth is plural, changes, and updates and modifies itself continuously (and thus remains alive). On a phenomenological level, it is the most absurd and contradictory category that the human sciences could use. Nevertheless, it exists (and therefore is studied); it is part of everyday and scientific-disciplinary language but must be understood in a critical and complex manner and in its "instrumental" use or in its "ideological/interpretative" or "discursive" non-ontological dimension.

Therefore, if we learn to overcome this knot, and in other words to understand, slowly loosen and abandon the "objectifying" meanings of these four key words of ours (*culture, multiculturalism, interculturalism, cultural*), we can open ourselves to a more dynamic, procedural and interpretative understanding. By doing so, it would no longer be a matter of defending, preserving, comparing or exchanging "things"; instead, we would be occupied in a manner that however must be more competent in perceiving, inhabiting and learning how to experience complex, interpretative and relational processes in which we are immersed and of which we are the co-protagonists. It is necessary to understand the dynamics and consequences that produce our identity "perception" and that of who is with us, thus attempting to internalise the result of humanity of each person without "objectifying" it, or in other words freezing it in a stereotyped and static vision of us and the other. Even if we disguise ourselves or tell ourselves or imagine our "cultural identity" or that of others as something that is "rather stable", this corresponds *in reality* to an interactive layering and a continuous, plural and dynamic contamination of different interpretations and actions, both on a generational and a sociocultural, value-based, economic, interpretative and performative level. It is a matter of understanding, experimenting, rereading and reflecting on these dynamics that have always inhabited man and constitute his "nature"... in terms of culture.

Not surprisingly, as I have been experimenting with students in my courses on *Intercultural communication* for years, to journey towards interculturalism, we could start precisely from the multiculturalism that is already inside of us and that, in a plural manner and with various roots and traditions, intertwines *in* and constitutes *our* personal

intercultural story³⁰; something, in other words, that becomes *interculturality* inside of us, just as much as it does outside of us. More than “individuals”, we are “multividu-als”³¹ who are plural, complex, porous people in relations that sediment and elaborate experiences while sometimes keeping different identities, dimensions and modes together, speaking different languages, acting in more “ubiquitous”³² ways every day in different in-person or online worlds.

4.2 Multiculturality/interculturality and formation

Another “knot” that must necessarily be overcome is the overlapping between (tolerant, welcoming and dialogue-based) multiculturalism and interculturality (which involves experiences of fusion, contamination, mutual hybridisation and the shared building of new, inclusive and inedited cultural processes): they are not the same thing. It is important for both the formative institution and the candidates to be capable of focusing on the various dynamics that present themselves or can be promoted when one wants to build a generally divisionist, and at the most tolerant multiculturalism; or a welcoming and dialogue-based multiculturalism or, instead...an interculturality, which we know to be something else with different objectives. It is important, along with the dimension of awareness, to proceed then to the qualification of related and more complex competences. Formative institutions are especially called on to operate in terms of planning as regards these different scenarios, and should make a clear choice and consequently build their educational offer. Formation in multiculturalism and formation towards interculturality are two different things. At the most, the former, if aware in terms of planning, could be a prior and intermediate step of the latter. Understanding the difference means overcoming the previous knot that made culture into a “thing” (that one has and one is) and enables the imagining of experiential paths of awareness, qualification and maturation. While tolerant and dialogue-based multiculturalism requires cognitive, relational and communicative abilities with regard to the knowledge, comprehension and non-judgment of *diversity*, thus attempting to build and manage common spaces and times and to share inclusive and non-conflictual practices, interculturality requires even more of these, which surpass the already valid and important ability to decentre oneself, which is mostly based on today and the management of the present. Interculturality asks to positively surpass, elaborate and manage the fear of mutual contamination and transformation, deems it necessary to comprehend cultural processes in a complex, dynamic and profound manner, requires cooperative collaboration and learning skills and, most of all, requires passion, desire and competence in building a future that no one possesses and that is not conceivable as being marked by the projection of the prevailing continuity/innovation of one of the involved parties. An intercultural future, as a conviviality of differences, is not “our” reality in the more open and inclusive future. It is a different reality that is built together and remains to be invented.

4.3 Formative projects and practices more than speeches

To accomplish this, it is necessary to overcome the ecclesiastical habit and that of traditional formation teaching, which employs the “discursive” remedy to support the promotion and change of reality. This is truly a “knot” that was often encountered during the research and that must be overcome. Multiculturalism and Interculturality are not “topics” to be spoken about. Choosing something regarding these inescapable dimensions of contemporary life and of formation does not mean inserting the topic into a text, a programme of resolutions that are written and documented for the future in a formative curriculum. It is not limited to organising meetings, conferences, seminars, in-person conventions or formative events or impromptu psychosocial workshops that “talk about it” or “help to talk more about it”. And the principle of those who sustain “that this could at least be an initial way to face the issue and start cir-

culating ideas” is not valid, for it is not so. Instead, it is a widespread way to make those who view dynamics connected with pluralism with distance or discomfort say that “the topic has already been dealt with, much space and time has already been dedicated to the topic and...it is necessary to *speak* about something else...”. Those, on the contrary, who are sensitive towards the matter delude themselves that “having spoken about it” surely triggered some reflection, activated some competence, or initiated some decisional dynamic; however, that usually does not happen or does not go far. We saw this in almost all of the environments that we encountered in the course of our action-research-training. People change, contexts are modified, gradually acquired competences require periodic assessments, enforcement and further formation and....many made decisions or matured competences are dispersed.

The accompaniment, promotion and transformation of cultural processes are dynamic, and complex competences that are not acquired in a deductive manner “by talking and reflecting” on what has not been experienced, or on what one has no authority over, and the possibility of changing and translating into action: in this sense, only frustrating intellectual, moral, or uselessly discursive vicious cycles are generated. The discursive and reflective activity of those who come *from* and work *on* an experience, and especially those who have the authority to and responsibility of making new experiences grow and ripen, is different. In such a case, hermeneutic and projectural circles are activated for the transformation of social action and are extremely fertile and capable of enabling change.

Briefly returning to what had been noticed during the brief 2007 survey on the relevance of the inculturation of novitiates in ICL with a high degree of multiculturalism, I would like to briefly touch upon a matter that has spread in ecclesiastical environments and Christian religious contexts in general: the matter of “word” and “discourse” as forms that are sufficient to trigger transformations. To “talk about”, “talk together about”, “listen to someone who talks about something” seem too often to be actions that are sufficient to promote choices, attitudes and cognitive, emotive and socio-relational competences. In brief, without entering a discipline that is not my own, we may say that in the “great code of the West” and the “grammar of existence”³³ of the Christian world, i.e. the Biblical, Semitic and Hellenistic text and context, God’s “saying” is creative (He says and things are) and “speaking with us” is pro-vocating, interlocutory (He calls man, acknowledging him as an interlocutor and man speaks, assumes a position and, at times, decides to...). However, God, and not immediately man, possesses this characteristic of often being able to speak³⁴ without “saying” (doing) anything creative for Himself, for others, or for reality. The “word” probably has a creative and poietic effect (that makes, produces, realises), creates and builds mental images and promotes interpretative forms that are then transformed into actions: yet all this only occurs (and can only occur) within a complex multifactorial, social, structural and experiential game.

In our case, something of the sort occurs: on the one hand, there is the horizon of the supposed sufficiency of “speaking” about multiculturalism and interculturality that is understandable within the schemes of cultural transmission based on deductive and asymmetrical teaching methodologies → teacher/formator who speaks → pupil who listens (obeys)/(and therefore) learns. On the other hand, I believe that there is a more or less innocent, (feigned) vice of omnipotence; that which is the action of God and that we think could work with the help of God, “speaking” of human processes, situations or dynamics, is borrowed while paying attention not to concretely affect their structure and institutional organisation. In other words, one avoids intervening in that which would really promote and really transform the same processes and the same situations or dynamics in a vital way. In my opinion, it is necessary to move on to more experiential and participative learning dynamics and to a tighter connection between action, word, interpretation and a concrete and structural transformation of reality. If this is really what is wanted.

Possible formative and educational paths

The experience that was gained during the research, observation, dialogue and reflection on what emerged from the FG, interviews, analysis of critical incidents and the Questionnaire, leads me to suggest possible formative paths to overcome the above mentioned “knots”. If desired in fact, it is possible to initiate itineraries for the maturation, efficient learning, realisation of concrete planning and a transformation (also of a structural nature) of the formative communities and their members. Having specified the difference between a) inclusive multiculturalism and b) creative, practical and projectual³⁵ interculturalism, we can imagine the former as a preparatory stage of the latter. However, it is a matter, for the institutions, of having and implementing a real formation project towards interculturalism and the promotion of intercultural competences.

Upon decisively leaving the episodic logic, or that of “content to be treated”, it will be important to imagine a specific commission/workgroup for communities or academic institutions with a high degree of multiculturalism that will elaborate and propose a participative construction of a project. We know in fact that someone can make a project on formation towards the management of multiculturalism for someone else. As regards interculturalism instead, it is necessary to move in a participative and dialogical sense³⁶, considering reality a strategic, rich and dialogical ally for maturation and change rather than a recipient to be sensitised or transformed according to a project that is not (or little) shared. In this sense, it is interesting, for the definition of the project, to involve the entire institution and/or community within a participative process of self-analysis, definition of objectives and action towards change³⁷.

The project will have to imagine not the realisation of an occasional event, but rather something that establishes a fixed, annual or semestral appointment of analysis, reflection, planning and assessment. It will have to devise systematic activities that will gradually transform and enrich the contents, methods, programmes, formation offer and updating of formators. It will have to imagine interculturalism as a transversal and transdisciplinary element.

Such a dynamic requires a dedicated workgroup, with an established working time to promote the collective comprehension of the intercultural horizon of the experience and of the formative structure. We may thus summarise the fundamental elements of this dynamic:

- a. a dedicated workgroup;
- b. an established and specific working time for the construction of the project;
- c. a participative, engaging and transparent methodology both for the building of the project and the implementation phases;
- d. that both the formators and the candidates are involved in the experience of planning and formation;
- e. a comparison *with* and the periodical presence of formators or resources outside of the institution;
- f. the activation of formal and non-formal experiences;
- g. the presence of institutionally established moments to assess the project in relation to expected results³⁸ and last, but very importantly,
- h. a patient and gradual pedagogy aimed at achieving goals that create a dialogue with periodic assessments of the workgroup and the involved basic reality.

Along with these elements, which apply to both of the units of analysis that were involved in our action-research-training, it is possible to single out specific elements and those of contextualisation:

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

- the connection between the topics of interdisciplinarity and those of cultural plurality with regards to the contents and methodologies of the formation proposal;
- the planning and realisation of participative Action Research that engages teachers and students in a multi and interdisciplinary manner³⁹;
- the elaboration of a “*Self-assessment form*” for the teacher/formator for the annual assessment of *attention towards plurilingualism and multiculturalism* in his or her courses in relation to disciplinary contents, methodologies of animation and student engagement, attention towards other contextual approaches, proposals of further bibliography and webgraphy, etc...;
- periodic *open workshops* available to students and teachers for analysis, assessment, creativity and *concrete planning* with regards to international, plurilinguistic and multicultural attention towards communication, management of spaces, common initiatives and the offer of formation proposals.

ICL FORMATIVE COMMUNITIES

- It is important to have *stable, and not occasional, congregational and intercongregational workshops* on the international, plurilinguistic and multicultural dimension not only of communitarian socialisation, but also of communitarian organisation (roles, decisional processes, planning and animation of pastoral and missionary work⁴⁰).
- Another element consists in opening a more systematic reflection on the perception and possible *multicultural, intercultural, and transcultural elaboration of the “charisma”* of ICL foundation⁴¹. Being inhabited today by plural men and women who are all undergoing an anthropological, social, cultural, and hyper/multimodal transition, how may it be devised, interpreted and experienced through modes and categories that are still ethnocentric, increasingly less attentive and increasingly less contextually comprehensible⁴²?
- Finally, it is important for each ICL, alone or in collaboration with others, to equip itself with a reflection and concrete guidelines to imagine annual or adequately frequent *formation itineraries* (also with an *external formator*) for formators and candidates on the dynamics of “formation” within a multicultural context in relation to the qualification and assessment of all subjects with regards to *intercultural competences*.

6

Conclusions

Interculturality is an inevitable process. It happens inside of and around us due to the complexity, communication and continuous intersection of different cultural processes and to the encounter and interaction of the human subjects who are involved in and bear it. Such bearers are biased and specific, simultaneously produced by and continuously builders of plural and inedited forms of these same processes. Interculturality may be experienced in an unconscious, conscious, or conscious and competent manner.

Culture and cultural identity are “categories” that try to define, in a mostly static way, that which is in continuous movement and too plural and complex to be appropriately defined. They are fragile, biased, temporary tools and they may be transformed into stereotyped ideas and ideologies, biased and provisory maps that expect to be the territory. Multiculturalism, as an interpretative *framework* and social dynamic is, on the one hand, the perception of the constitutive pluralism of the only humanity and, on the other hand, the attempt that is always a bit precarious to categorise, de-fine, con-fine, identify ourselves and the different other⁴³ and make the various differences interact in the most manageable way.

The subjects that are involved in the game of multiculturalism, understood as bearers of “specific and different identities” may not recognise themselves in such identities, or they may accept the “label received” from the understanding of others, welcome being stereotyped and trivialised by others, and somehow thus identify themselves. Later though, the process tends to “go mad” and proceed towards mutual ideological, biased and rather precarious identity definitions, until it gradually expires towards the “us”/“them” logic.

The understanding of cultural diversity and pluralism is an important cognitive and formative step, but it cannot always be the horizon of identity and relational awareness and maturity simply because it does not coincide with reality in its fullness and complexity. The various forms of multiculturalism or multiculturalism usually lead to forced divisions, precarious balances and recurring conflicts. Almost never does cultural diversity correspond to a social, economic and communicative symmetry. And usually the “multicultural” management of plural and multicultural reality (I apologise for the play on words) has asymmetric subjects and is brought forth by dominant actors against subaltern actors that tend to put in place, for the most part, marginal alternatives of resilience or (blatant or hidden) conflictual strategies of resistance. In the meantime, all “learn” a communicative and managerial mode: that in which the model of multiculturalism is determined by those who detain power and whose turn it is to do so. In such a sense, it is also⁴⁴ possible to explain the postcolonial realities where there has been a passage from one social or “ethnic” group’s processes of social, cultural and political transformation to the marginality and exclusion experienced by another social or “ethnic” group by means of simple substitution or turnover. And the same process may happen (is it already happening?) in some ICL where most of the members no longer belong to the European-Western area of foundation.

It is necessary to experiment, learn, and spread other ways of planning and acting within plural diversity. Conscious and competent interculturality chooses participative and dialogical modes of *coworking* and *cooperative learning*. It is therefore not a matter of doing something for the respectful and partially inclusive welcoming of “others, those who are different”, but also of trying to build an approaching world together where everyone, albeit being (and precisely because they are) different brothers and sisters⁴⁵, can provide their own contribution. This action-research-training has attempted to set some processes in motion in order to analyse what exists more clearly and make it the object of a shared reflection. It also attempted to open a path to catch a glimpse of some alternatives capable of valuing the intercultural competences that are present, and to imagine the promotion and formation of those who expect more attention. The Italian ecclesiastical world of academic education and of the (extremely multicultural) formative ICL communities has been the field of exploration and perhaps the true and familiar context in which researchers have been moving for a long time and for which they believe that some attention and transformations are urgent and necessary. Nevertheless, these transformations may only occur in a conscious and participated manner by deciding in favour of serious, competent and gradual work. The path is open, and perhaps has been so for quite some time...



Endnotes

1. T. VÃN NGUYEN, *From Multiculturalism to Interculturalism: the Aim of Theological Education in Today's Global Context*, "CrossCurrents" 69, 1 (2019) 24-28. (<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/782685/summary>; <https://archive.is/Hta7Z>).
2. This was also accomplished by means of comparisons with the observational notes that were required of the various members of the research * quipe*, especially during the compilation of the reports by the focus groups (FG), and with the comments and reflections that were shared during the field work or briefings.
3. This word "enrichment", or "richness", which is connected to cultural plurality, struck me then, as also in the findings of the present research, as recurrent. However, it was intended in the (convenient) sense of an accumulation, an addition to something that is "known" or "had", but not something that one "is". It therefore is a sort of internal collection that does not become (for there is fear that it could become) syncretism, fusion, and the construction of a richer identity, as it is different and transformed in an inedited in a way that is plural and complex, diverse and transformed.
4. Cf. E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI, *Interculturalism in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities: An Action-Research-Training Project in Italy*, in *Id.* (eds.), *Education in Multiculturalism, Education to Interculturalism in Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy*, Urbaniana University Press, Citt  del Vaticano 2023, 33-38.
5. Cf. *ibid.*, 35-37.
6. It was difficult to get the teachers to participate in the FG, and this is an "ethnographic" fact that is worth reflecting on. For example, in one academic institution that had been a co-partner of the research project since the beginning, and was therefore engaged and informed by means of numerous initiatives and meetings, we managed to create only two teacher FG, which is still more compared to the institutions that only accepted one. Nevertheless, the participation of the teachers was affected by systematic withdrawals. Starting with 43 teachers, of which 11 were permanent (including emeritus, full and extraordinary professors), we found ourselves at the first meeting with one permanent professor, who was the head, one lecturer and five invited professors, one of whom dropped out before the end. At the second meeting, the one and same permanent professor, i.e. the head, one lecturer and four invited professors, one of which arrived after the meeting started, were present. In the case of the other institutions, where only one or two meeting(s) were arranged, the participants were not numerous but were relevant in comparison with situations like the reported example.
7. Such resistance should be considered somewhat normal, as there has been an Agency of the Holy See for the Evaluation and Promotion of Quality in Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties that periodically organises "procedures for individual academic institutions" by arranging visits *in loco* by experts since 2007. Cf. http://www.avepro.glauco.it/avepro/english/00000282_Who_we_are.html; <https://archive.is/mKqHK>.
8. The number of FG that were formed within the various pontifical and ecclesiastical university institutions was based on a proportional sampling base, and the number of FG was greater in institutions with more students. A similar procedure was employed for the ICL formation communities by creating one FG (for each of three meetings) in small communities, and two or more in larger ones.
9. Once again, cf. PANDOLFI – OTTONE, *Interculturalism*, § 3.
10. Cf. L. DI CENSI, *The Intercultural Challenge in Multicultural Education Communities: Results of the Quantitative Survey*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, Tab. 3 and Tab. 5, 163.164.

11. No general data on the others were received.
12. Cf. L. Di Censi, *The Intercultural Challenge*, Tab 3, and Tab. 5, 163. 164.
13. The STI-PIME of Monza (male institution) hosts the Missionary Theological Study, which includes students from a dozen nations: it is now affiliated with the PUU and is also open to male and female laypersons, even only as an “audience”. This explains the female presence (theological study) that has been increasing in a male context (seminary) since 2018. Cf. <https://www.pimeseminariomonza.com>; <https://archive.is/VLldl>.
14. This is not a rhetorical reference: to understand this last contribution, which is part of an extensive and polyphonic *report*, it is necessary to have at least read those preceding it and the Introduction to our action-research-training, written in collaboration with Prof. Ottone, with a certain degree of attention.
15. Cf. OTTONE – PANDOLFI, *Interculturality*, 47.
16. I reiterate that in the course of the *quantitative phase* (March – June 2021) during the online administration of the Questionnaire, the supervisors and heads of the formation of 615 ICL located within the Italian territory were contacted. 409 female religious institutes were contacted through the secretariat of the national USMI, and 206 male institutes through the secretariat of the Italian Conference of Major Superiors (in Italian Conferenza Italiana dei Superiori Maggiori or CISM). Every institute received an e-mail with a brief presentation of the project, the request to notify the research équipe of the presence of formation communities featuring a certain degree of national plurality among its members, and the willingness to spread the Questionnaires among its members and invite them to anonymously complete it online. The invitation was sent twice to each ICL in the months of March and April 2021. None of the 206 male ICL ever answered.
17. Cf. M. CAMPS ET AL., *Ante una iglesia machista, ¿qué hacer?*, “El Ciervo” 43 (1994) 520/521, 5-13 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/permanent/40820374>) and especially the study by Zaíra Ary of the Universidade Federal do Ceará, Z. ARY, *Masculino y femenino no imaginário católico. Da Ação Católica à Teologia da Libertação*, Annablume Ed., Sao Paulo 2000.
18. This expansion has been stigmatised by Pope Francis in many of his interventions. The report that he gave in an interview some years ago, where he analysed the phenomenon of clericalism in the context of consecrated life, is interesting. Cf. FRANCESCO, *La forza della vocazione. La vita consacrata oggi*, (conversazioni con Fernando Prado), EDB, Bologna 2008.
19. The phenomenon of Christian and Christian Catholic “clericalism”, as a masculine form of authority and attitude pertaining to a separate religious cast, typical of European or Western tradition, is then united in the Catholic clergy of other origin with diverse local traditions where the difference and superiority of man over woman is marked. This leads to the overlapping and fusion of social and culture modes that are increasingly in tension and contrast with a globalised world that demands greater equality and emancipation for its female components.
20. In the teacher FG “the topic of multiculturalism underpins all discussions, while interculturality is barely touched upon. [...] Multiculturalism is not managed with an intercultural objective, especially in academic communities where teachers do not perceive this commitment as part of their mission”. F. DERIU, *Intercultural Competences in Teacher Training Communities: Key Concepts Identified by the Text Analyses of Focus Groups*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 95, 110.
21. Cf. within the boundless literature on post-colonial studies, the interesting work of S. BOAVENTURA DE SOUSA, *Epistemologies of the South. Justice against Epistemicide*, Routledge, London & New York, NY 2016.
22. And the recent global lockdown due to the Covid19 pandemic, along with the related spread of remote teaching at all levels of education and formation, has enforced such reflections.
23. This was accomplished both by directly analysing the data and reading the analyses of Deriu, Deliu, Di Censi and Ottone that precede the present contribution.
24. Cf. DERIU, *Intercultural*, 93-102.

25. However, such expressive poverty may be ascribed in part to the fact that this exchange occurred in Italian and not their mother tongue.
26. Cf. DI CENSI, *The Intercultural*, § 4.3., 175-178.
27. Cf. E. OTTONE, *Intercultural Competences under Construction: Qualitative Analysis of Narration of Critical Incidents by a Group of University Students*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 182-234.
28. We are referring to people with an extensive disciplinary background who are mostly dedicated to philosophy, theology and some human sciences that are imagined as universal but rooted in European thought.
29. For more on this, cf. F. REMOTTI, *L'ossessione identitaria*, "Rivista Italiana di Gruppoanalisi" 25 (2011) 1, 9-29 (<http://www.parcobarro.it/meab/ossessione.pdf>), known for the two books *Contro l'identità*, Laterza, Bari 2006² and *L'ossessione identitaria*, Laterza, Bari 2017, as well as for the latest, *Somiglianze. Una via per la convivenza*, Laterza, Bari 2019. As far as the Italian context is concerned, the works of the anthropologist M. AIME, *Identità*, Mondadori, Milano 2014 and *Classificare, separare, escludere. Razzismi e identità*, Einaudi Torino 2020, and that of the psychologist A. O. FERRARIS, *La costruzione dell'identità*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2022 are also interesting. For more within the Anglophone context, L. McDOWELL (ed.), *Undoing Place? A Geographical Reader*, Routledge, London 2020 contains the contribution S. HALL, *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, 222-237, written in 1997 and still very relevant (see <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/postgraduate/masters/modules/asiandiaspora/hallculturalidentityanddiaspora.pdf>).
30. Each of us almost always bears the fact of having inhabited and having learned "the language" and the way of thinking and acting of many worlds and many "cultures": the generations we have encountered, encounter, and that we have crossed, the ages of life that have followed one another and that we are living today, the urban or rural contexts that we have experienced and internalised, the socio-economic statuses in which we were born, that we have crossed, and that constitute part of our *forma mentis* and of our ways of reading the world, lived or encountered religious experiences, etc. Each of us is a unique, syncretic, and conscious – to a greater or lesser degree – synthesis of all of this.
31. Or «*condividuals*», as anthropologist Marco Aime suggests when commenting and citing the latest publication by F. REMOTTI, *Somiglianze. Una via per la convivenza*, Laterza, Bari 2019 (<https://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/somiglianze-una-la-convivenza>; <https://archive.is/IEjWj>).
32. Cf. M. CANEVACCI, *Il Simultaneo e l'Ubiquo*, "Rivista di Scienze Sociali" 11 (2014) in <https://www.rivistadiscienze sociali.it/digitale-simultaneo-ubiquo/>; <https://archive.is/3z1Ms>.
33. As indicated in the interesting, rich and complex introduction to Biblical texts by P. STEFANI, *Il grande racconto della Bibbia*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2017.
34. Cf. *Gospel according to Matthew 7*, 21-29: «Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven».
35. Cf. also L. PANDOLFI, *Palabras ambiguas y caminos posibles. La Vida Consagrada en la Iglesia Católica en la multiculturalidad contemporánea porosa e interconectada*, "Revista CLAR" LIX (2021) 2, 58-71.
36. Cf. ID., *Animazione interculturale cooperativa*, in ID. (ed.), *Interculturalidad cooperativa. Il Progetto /1*, Aracne, Roma 2010, 107-132.
37. I refer here to two authors who were very active at the end of the XX century in Latin America but are still extremely relevant for their realisation of experiences of this sort. I am referring to O. FALS BORDA – C. RODRÍGUEZ BRANDÃO, *Investigación Participativa*, De la Banda Oriental, Montevideo 1987 and E. ANDER-EGG, *Repensando la Investigación Acción Participativa*, Lumen Humanitas, Buenos Aires 2003.
38. They are not identified, as usually happens with a series of infinitive "verbs" which, being verbs, are non-objective "actions", do not possess a subject and, by definition (known as infinitive), do not possess a clear concluded time of realisation. The expected result is described by a defined subject (in our case, the candidate who finished or is undergoing formation, the

teacher or the student, the entire institution), a concluded action (i.e. an acquired competence, a developed attitude, achieved learning, a transformed situation, an occurred change) and a precise timeframe in which such an action is completed.

39. Cf. D. ZOLETTO – F. ZANON, *La ricerca-azione come “risposta” alle sfide emergenti nei contesti educativi eterogenei. Responsabilità sociale dell’università e formazione in servizio degli insegnanti*, “Lifelong Lifewide Learning” 15 (2019) 33, 13-25 (<https://doi.org/10.19241/lll.v15i33.169>; <https://archive.is/DSdKP>).
40. It is necessary to pay attention when one wants to work on institutions by exclusively changing the shared “contents” by imagining that this will then change relations, practices, ways of thinking and decisional dynamics. It is also necessary to work simultaneously and in a systematic and correlated manner on structures and organisations. Cultural diversity often suffers from structural diversity and asymmetries; therefore, instating dialogue on interculturality without changing organisations, structures and roles may become inconclusive or illusory. Cf. D.A. HARRISON – K.J. KLEIN, *What’s the Difference? Diversity Constructs as Separation, Variety, or Disparity in Organizations*, “Academy of Management Review” 32 (2007) 4, 1199-1228.
41. Cf. R. TOMICHÁ CHARUPÁ, *Lo trans-cultural: símbolo que trans-figura la consagración a la vida*, “Revista CLAR” 59 (2021) 2, 72-81 and L. PANDOLFI, *Cultura e transculture. Tra comunità di vita e comunità di pratica nella Vita Consacrata*, in *Insieme senza esitare. La Vita Consacrata fra diversità generazionali e culturali*, Quaderni CISM, Edizioni Ancora, Milano 2020, 80-92.
42. See the two contributions from the Jesuit priest Sosa and the Verbite Weber at the 2017 semestral Congress of the Union of Superiors General (in Italian Unione Superiori Generali, or USG) entitled “Il discernimento vocazionale in un mondo interculturale; A. Sosa, *Interculturalidad, Catolicidad y Vida Consagrada* in <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZQr4wYn-mrk6OtnKx1JnKpxnwNibTJHtT/edit> and M. WEBER, *Vocational Discernment in an Intercultural World*, in <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zcGXXks2srOq1Nae6xPwbZFw-UlINvzz/edit>.
43. Cf. M. AUGÉ, *Qui donc est l’autre?*, Odile Jacob, Paris 2017 (trad. it., *Chi è dunque l’altro?*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2019, 38).
44. Also, but not only... clearly. In fact, all of the processes of (apparent) decolonialisation and autonomy of countries or territories that have experienced the military, political, economic and cultural domination of a European country or another powerful country at a geopolitical level, may be only partially explained through the substitution of violent and exclusionary colonial power with an internal (ethnic, religious, political) faction that is just as violent and exclusionary. We realise that it is impossible to comprehend these dynamics without recognising the influence and continuous interference of ongoing external factors (actors) that determine them, thus characterising them in terms of their contradictions and complexity.
45. Cf. R. LÓPEZ VILLASEÑOR – J. ANDRADE, *Fratelli tutti: los caminos de la interculturalidad en la vida religiosa*, “Revista CLAR” 59 (2021) 2, 122-128.

Part Three

**EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATION
TO INTERCULTURALITY
IN CONSECRATED LIFE
AND IN LAITY MOVEMENTS**



Opportunities and Challenges of Intercultural Encounters in Religious Education Centres

❖ Robin Sahaya Seelan



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Abstract

Intercultural Encounters enrich our formation today, as it is an indispensable element of our contexts, both local and global. The article focuses on the challenges and opportunities that both formees and formators face within the experience of multiculturalism and prepares the ground to transit from multiculturalism to authentic interculturality. It analyses the “spaces within” formation centres, double consciousness and epistemological pluralism and wants the reader to consider the presence of three opportunities, namely ontological assumptions (understanding ourselves and the world around us), historiographical enquiry (studying local histories) and sociology of absences (studying the silence and silenced voices). What we need today is “Intercultural translation” which acts as the basis for opening up new spaces for communal resistance and social struggles. This way our formation centres will help holistic training and enable us to offer glory to God.

Keywords

Interculturality – Formation – Pluralism – Spaces

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Introduction

Human encounters are not that easy to assess. Each of us carry within us a past, some of which is inexplicable, either for want of right words in another language or for the inability to describe those experiences because of its contents, either too sacred or too inhumane. When two humans interact, especially when they are from two different cultural settings, these encounters are complicated, even more so when these two humans are candidates for religious life, now within one 'mono' cultural setting of the religious life, noticeably, within the frames of a religious formation centre.

Religious formation centres face the double tasks of introducing or strengthening "formees" into a new "religious culture", along with sustaining the good or positive elements that the formees bring with them from their native cultures. These tasks are further complexed because the formators too continue to grow in a religious culture of their particular congregation and have a greater awareness of their own respective native cultures, and decide either to distance themselves completely from it or immerse totally in it, or strike a midway. Additionally, since religious formation takes place within a wider setting of the universal church, the tasks are further complexified. In other words, intercultural encounters in religious formation settings need to be carefully understood and analyzed for efficiency and relevance.

The purpose of education within religious formation is two-fold. Primarily, it is to help formees learn basics of philosophy, theology, consecrated life, etc. But beyond this, it is to help the formees and the formators discover the society from different angles. As Du Bois said in his 1903 seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk*, «The function of the university is not simply to teach breadwinning, or to furnish teachers for the public schools, or to be a centre of polite society; it is, above all, to be the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life, and adjustment which forms the secret of civilization»¹. Philosophizing these, but focusing more on learning and education, this presentation offers a philosophical analysis using a phenomenological method and a deconstruction method, from the Indian contexts. It considers three challenges currently present in formation centres and also presents these as opportunities for a better formation in the Catholic Church.

1

The Indian Context

Religious formation in India cannot be mute to the things happening around. The growth of intolerance, fundamentalism, communalism, increasing poverty, polarization and hatred, etc. continue to affect us, collectively and individually. Treated with suspicion, facing hostility from It is necessary to sincerely delve deep into the socio-cultural realities and realign our formation accordingly, especially at the level of education, chiefly philosophy, theology, and spirituality. The following paragraphs are developed against this background.

2

Spaces within

There are three players in formation centres: formees, formators, and religious structures. Structures have a "juridical life" and therefore need to be considered as a key player too. These players operate within the formation centres which are "practice spaces" and thus, in a way, protective spaces too. They are meant to be safe spaces wherein the formees can learn, discover, and shape up one's own self, chiefly in collaboration with the other two players. The term "practice spaces" also indicate that mistakes, especially in understanding one's own self and culture and accepting others with their specific cultural backgrounds can arise. Yet, it is inevitable and, in a way, essential too, to grow up as 'intercultural persons' in multicultural set-

tings. As formees enter into “religious” spaces, a feeling of difference or strangeness emerges as the “religious culture” is different. This strangeness makes the person who enters either ashamed of his or her own specific culture or feels too proud or superior to “adjust” to the new setting.

On the other hand, the formators, with all goodwill, can sometimes fail to “understand” the formees with their specificities, especially with regard to their worldviews, way of relating, behaving etc. They forget that the formation houses are “spaces” within which the younger ones need to grow. The formators face an additional challenge of “generation gap”. With rapid changes happening within cultures, the gap between elders and young people is another factor which needs to be accepted and understood, especially in the context of formal education within religious formation. Religious structures have evolved over “time-tested” practices, and therefore, they expect the formees and their formators to “fall in line”, as it invites them to enter into a new “religious culture”, which is often distinct and separate from the “outside” social cultures. While structures are indispensable, the tendency to become overtly institutionalized becomes problematic. Rigidity, categorization, compartmentalization, etc. can make intercultural contacts artificial, if not outright denial of existence of cultural settings for the formees and the formators.

A related issue is the “universality-uniformity” type of understanding of religious culture. Since there is certain universality in congregations, the desire for uniform practices in each of the houses, especially in formation houses, can occupy that space that the individual or a collective body might seek to have. When uniformity overrides individual cultural factors, then interculturality becomes difficult. Seeking a balance between both these can be cumbersome, but nevertheless, necessary. The idea of universality can also bring in “elitist approaches” in architecture, etiquette and courtesies, and could also inject feelings of inferiority in the formees and formators. This needs to be kept in mind especially when sometimes our theologies and philosophies can appear to be elitist, namely, those that negate the existence of social injustices, especially in the context of India.

3

Double consciousness

The second challenge is the integration of “double consciousness” of the formees and the formators. For instance, a Jesuit from India might be conscious of his identity as a Jesuit as well as being an Indian. In the Indian context, this double consciousness is further complicated – another dual consciousness appears – caste and language. In a way, the identity of a former has different layers: religious, national, linguistic, and ethnic. Interculturality, then, becomes more challenging in this case, especially when the candidate or the formator does not want to reveal one or the other identities mentioned above. «It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity»². During the course of his/her religious formation/education, attention to this element will help the former to discover oneself.

Caste consciousness is quite complicated in India since a sense of shamefulness, which is attached to the caste, especially if one comes from a “lower” caste, is attached to it. The social hierarchical mind-set does not get diminished just because one becomes a “religious”. Though rigorous spiritual training does bring certain changes, it appears that these are insufficient. Isolating oneself from the social situation is not a solution, for we have to come back to the society again for ministries. Therefore, a thorough context-based analysis of the society is needed at the time of formation. More specifically, placing our studies in the context of the people cannot be underestimated.

In the Indian context, we cannot deny the effects of colonialism, though seven decades have passed by since independence. There are various features that we have appropriated unto ourselves from the colonial era, even without a conscious effort. To note and understand the residual effects of colonialism is an important step in understanding who we are. One also needs to note that despite Christianity being in this land even before “India” was born, the tag that it is a ‘foreign religion’ still continues, partly because it has come to be identified with the British and the Portuguese who were once colonizers.

A constant tension between uprootedness and belonging takes place all the time in young minds. It can also be found even in those finally professed formators. The spiritual idea of belonging completely to the Lord does not take away one’s own historicity or historical links with one’s own culture. The dilemma between these two cannot be summarily dismissed as irrelevant to the idea of interculturality, for one cannot be intercultural without “crossing over” and understanding the other, lest they fall into the pit of “better-than-you” attitudes.

4

Epistemological pluralism

A third challenge in intercultural contacts and encounters in formation centres is related to epistemology. Are there several ways of knowing? As products of Eurocentrism, Vedic-centrism, Brahmin-centrism continue to dominate our thinking patterns, there is a challenge to learn from others, without placing an axis point. Unfortunately, much of our theologies and philosophies are still Euro-centric, and a heavy concentration on Western Philosophy is placed. How does this affect interculturality? In Intercultural relations and communication, there is an element of de-centering. But with emphasis placed on the West, other cultural philosophies get sidelined.

Epistemological pluralism appreciates and acknowledges the fact that there are many ways of knowing. The current education system (both in formation centres and in other educational systems) relies solely on information gathering and passing to the students, well placed within some syllabus. Apart from this, quite often a top-down model of instruction is considered the normal way of learning. Models and theoretical frames that have emerged from other cultural contexts are universalized or are presented as methodologies worth imitating in local contexts, without minding learning from the local cultural contexts. A heavy dose of Eurocentric ideas is absorbed both consciously and at the subconscious levels.

What is essential is to make use of multiple epistemologies to understand complex issues, knowing that these epistemologies can be made use of to complement each other. Both in content and method, when only a mono-type is presented as the best way, then there emerges a hierarchical type of understanding, resulting eventually in stereotypes. Setting up “standards” or “qualities” based on the West has its advantages, but it also has its flaws. It is often based on certain type of skills, competence, expectations etc., to which the Western world is already adept. In the process local traditions, knowledge, skills etc. are ignored and neglected. While competence is based to assess the ‘best’ out of certain ‘uniformity’, the idea of competition itself could vary. Learning to accommodate each other’s approaches, competencies, knowledge bases is a real challenge in multicultural formation.

Another issue is the “perspective” being offered. The “subaltern perspective” is often ignored, leading to ‘epistemic violence’. The subaltern perspective is considered to be non-existent in many of our education pattern, for they are not presented in ‘standard formats’. For example, the philosophies of certain tribes or Dalit castes are not scripted in epic-style prose, or in essay-type books. Instead, these are encapsulated within oral traditions, which include stories, proverbs, wisdom sayings, performing art forms, etc, commonly termed as “folklore”. In Antonio Gramsci’s

analysis, «folklore is the perspective that subaltern groups have on their lives and surrounding world»³. These might fail the set formats of the academic world. Yet these voices need to be heard and epistemological pluralism includes them as well. Unfortunately, “majoritarianism” mind-set remains in many of our institutions, and this hinders learning from the marginalized cultures. And at the most, when such learning does take place, they are placed as “fringe topics” or “additional” elements and they hardly come to be recognized as important factors.

This issue is also related to resistance to leave known horizons. Such resistance emerges because of conditioning. As Jiddu Krishnamurthi, an Indian Philosopher noted, “even our conscience is conditioned”. This also means that our knowledge is conditioned and our resistance to new learning would always be there. New paradigms of learning tend to be treated with suspicion in traditional teaching modes. How we wish that Paulo Freire’s method of education be taken seriously in centres of learning in our formation houses! Freire’s method emerges from his context and offers a pedagogy of the oppressed.

5

The opportunities

The aforementioned three challenges – spaces within, double consciousness, and epistemological pluralism – are also opportunities to grow in interculturality. In addition to these, three other factors could be considered as opportunities in religious formation:

Ontological assumptions: Unlike other religions, there is a space for reason, growth, and change in our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Faith and reason are not considered contradictory in the Church, but as complementary to each other. With greater awareness of the existence other philosophies and theologies, the current time is best suited to question many of our ontological assumptions on our relationships with ourselves, God, the others, and with nature. Interrelated and interdependent as we are, awareness of human dignity, freedom, etc. provide us with further opportune time, especially in the wake of the upcoming Synod 2021-23, the just ended COP 26, COVID-19 etc. It is also an opportunity to become aware and to check the processes of “othering” that takes place within. There is the “Exotic Other” in which there is «a fascination with the inherent dignity and beauty of the primitive/undeveloped other, and the “Demonic Other”, represented as inferior, negative, savage and evil»⁴.

Historiographical enquiry (Studying Local histories): A lot of time is spent on learning world and national histories, but not much is done in terms of learning regional and local histories. How many of us have been taught about the history of our local parishes, cultures, villages, towns, etc.? More than often, these are overlooked or considered insignificant. At the most, those who become missionaries spend time in learning about the culture of the missioned place. But beyond these, formation in seminaries can offer courses leading up to understanding the local cultures of the place where they are stationed, the cultures of those formees who come from other places, and the cultures of the formators too. Inculturation as a process is both an opportunity and a challenge. In the process of religious education, it is essential to observe and acknowledge a lack of sense of belonging to the local culture where the Gospel is planted. Apart from mere ‘symbolic’ changes, an in-depth study of inculturation is a real need in religious formation/education. Such studies have two-fold purpose: to get the Gospel rooted in the native soil, and second, to respect local cultures. Indigenization is another process. It is not the same as interculturality but is equally important. It is closely related to interculturality, for many indigenous people (we call them tribals!) have now come forward to serve the church as priests, brothers and nuns.

«Indigenization benefits everyone; we all gain a richer understanding of the world and of our specific location in the world through awareness of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Indigenization also contributes to a more just world, creating a shared understanding that opens the way toward reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It also counters the impacts of colonization by upending a system of thinking that has typically discounted Indigenous knowledge and history»⁵.

“*Sociology of absences*”: This idea and term was developed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, a sociologist. The term refers

«both to the general silences *around* particular experiences and the way in which these silences are actively created *through* particular processes. It enables an address of what is marginalized, suppressed, and of what has not been allowed to exist in the first place. It focuses on the processes that obstruct connections to be made between different struggles and knowledges to demonstrate how the “incompleteness” and “inadequacy” of counter-hegemonic forms is produced»⁶.

Our formation has both a need and an opportunity to study these ‘absences’ or “silences” or “silenced” voices. In the context of India, this is an opportune time for us to get ourselves familiarized, especially as the Church is increasingly becoming aware of the voices of oppression. The context of the Dalits, Tribals, widows, Transgenders and others need more to be understood. Getting engaged locally is thus an imperative, not only on the pastoral front, but also on the social and cultural areas as well.

Intercultural translation is what is needed today in religious education. This concept, expounded by Boaventura de Sousa Santos

«seeks to put forth a conversation between different knowledges that are anchored in different cosmologies. Intercultural translation, in a sense, is a tool that inaugurates and allows the sharing of struggles and risks premised upon making absent knowledges visible and the various layers of oppression intelligible. Consequently, intercultural translation acts as the basis for opening up new spaces for communal resistance and social struggle»⁷.

Conclusion

Our contemporary society continues to see vast changes and it is too difficult to grasp the speed in which these changes are taking place. One of the changes is noticed in our way of living together in multicultural settings. While on the one hand, there is deep misgivings and intolerance, there is also on the other hand, positive elements of mutual co-existence. Religious formation centres cannot be blind to these, especially in its educative elements at various levels, including at the university educational level. Identifying a few of them from the Indian context has been the focus of this paper. We need such a focus in order to become relevant in our ministries and in our lives as religious, seeking to glorify our Creator.



Endnotes

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2. *Ibid.*, 38.
3. A. GRAMSCI, *Subalternity*, “Global Social Theory”, 2021 (<https://globalsocialtheory.org/concepts/subalternity/>; <https://archive.is/JFdtU>).
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Formation in Interculturality for Formators and Leaders of Female Consecrated Life

Challenges and Good Practices

❖ Patricia Murray



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Abstract

The study of culture and the understanding of interculturality are needed by women formators, leaders and superiors of communities of consecrated life for women. At UISG, from local to global levels, we have seen the need for leaders and formators to know the dynamics of culture and the call to become intercultural in order to build communion and witness to the prophetic nature of consecrated life. This short essay indicates the paths followed and the challenges still to be met.

Keywords

Formation – Interculturality – Consecrated life – Leaders

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Introduction

I am very pleased to participate in today's panel to share experiences of formation in interculturality. Obviously, I will be focusing on female religious life, from my experience within the *Unione Internazionale delle Superiore Generali* (UISG) where we have almost 2,000 leaders of female congregations responsible for 600,000 sisters worldwide. In the past decades, the leadership and membership of religious congregations has become increasingly multicultural. Donald S. McGavran refers to «the flourishing of luxurious human diversity» worldwide and this is also true within religious communities. Some speak about this phenomenon as «a bewildering diversity»¹ and Sr. Marie Chin RSM refers to «the labyrinth of cultures in religious life»².

The recent document from the Dicastery for Consecrated Life, *New Wine in New Wineskins*, at n. 7 notes that:

«Many religious congregations, especially female congregations, have passed from almost entirely monocultural contexts to the challenge of multiculturalism. International communities were established that for some institutes represented the first courageous experience in leaving their geographic and cultural boundaries»³.

However just because sisters live in multicultural contexts does not necessarily equip them to negotiate multiple cultures and become intercultural. There are many challenges in learning to live interculturality but we can learn from good practice.

1

Understanding culture and intercultural dynamics

It takes study, experience, good honest conversations, reflection and time to understand culture and intercultural dynamics; it is a complex learning process – a journey of awareness and of deepening. The study of culture and an understanding of interculturality is necessary on the part of formators and leaders. It should also be part of initial and ongoing formation. Understanding culture is like peeling an onion, as layer after layer unfolds. Culture has been compared to the air we breathe, which we only notice when it is absent. It is the «set of norms according to which things are run or simply “are” in a particular society or country, and to which members of the society or group adhere in values, attitudes, interpretations and behaviors»⁴. Cultural identity is an important part of a person's overall identity. To understand and respect another person's culture is to affirm that person's identity and acknowledge her/his dignity.

At UISG from local to global levels we have seen the need for leaders and formators to learn about dynamics of culture and the call to become intercultural in order to build communion and to witness the prophetic nature of consecrated life. Sometimes in religious life statements are made such as «well this doesn't apply to our province – we are all from the same culture». Yet we have largely ignored local sub-cultures or allowed the congregational culture to obscure the fact that members come from many different rich cultural backgrounds. The congregational culture has masked instead of celebrated difference.

In recent years female religious congregations have undertaken “cultural audits” to determine to what extent sisters feel respected at the level of their cultural identity. This type of exercise – asking participants to respond anonymously to a questionnaire – provides an opportunity for honest sharing in a safe environment about cultural differences and their impact. In one such safe environment sisters shared the following experiences. One person said: «I feel that I have tasted a rich banquet hosted by members of the global community (...) and I will never be the same again». Some spoke of the experience, as an opportunity for personal transformation; of the chal-

lenge of becoming a learner and being led like a child; of uncovering one's own prejudice and a tendency to stereotype others; many spoke their new appreciation of the cultures in which they were living and ministering.

Then there were other voices. A sister from an immigrant family said: «While most of the community are warm and welcoming, some of them are very hard to accept me in the way of my English speaking and culture. I try very hard to speak like them but my tongue couldn't do it well». An African sister living in a predominantly European community said: «When others say *I don't see colour* while the remark is well meaning I don't find it helpful as colour is an essential part of who I am». Another sister said «living in an inter-tribal, inter-racial community is hard, you can't identify the contents until you scoop into the pot and taste them».

In other cultural audits members have spoken of the experience of the hurt caused by overt or covert prejudice, generalizations, wounding remarks, reciprocal misunderstandings. Despite these experiences conversations rarely take place around differences and issues such as racism is never addressed openly. Some practice a double approach: «In the presence of members from the "other" culture, we emphasize the positive... but when we are with those of our own culture, it is all the negatives (about the other culture) that emerge». The congregation who undertook these audits were subsequently able to reflect on the experiences shared and to ask themselves individually/communally what needed to change, what conversion was needed so that all sisters felt truly "at home".

The missiologist Aylward Shorter invites us to begin our intercultural learning by first believing «...in the positive character of other cultures» and then actively nurturing «the desire to be enriched by them». He says «(we) must welcome those of other cultures and give them (our) unreserved trust»⁵. Formators and leaders and members in congregations must be prepared to learn not only the spoken language of the other, but also come to know the different cultural signs and symbols which transmit meaning, as we know a shake of the head doesn't mean the same thing in all cultures and silence carries different levels of significance! In my experience many misunderstandings arise in multicultural communities because there is a lack of basic knowledge to understand and interpret the communication or behavior of a person from another culture. Cultural knowledge *involves understanding the norms and communication rules of other cultures* so that the behavior of people from another culture can be interpreted accurately. Various studies indicate that most cultural awareness happens on a trial-and-error basis and that the inaccurate knowledge gleaned can often have negative results.

Different frameworks exist which draw on the work of cultural anthropologists and intercultural specialists to help us understand culture and cultural dynamics. Here is one such framework with 9 lens:

1. *Who Are We? High and Low Context Cultures.*
2. *Who am I? Ego-centric and Socio-centric Cultures.*
3. *Who Is In Charge? High and Low Power Distance Cultures.*
4. *How We Deal with Uncertainty? High or Low Uncertainty Avoidance.*
5. *Doing or Being. Being or Doing Cultures.*
6. *Time Orientation: Long or Short Term Orientation.*
7. *Time Orientation: Linear or Circular.*
8. *Space Orientation: Close or Distant.*
9. *Formation Learning Cultures.*

Lens number one highlights the role that *context* plays in communication between people from different cultures –elements such as body language, silence, facial expression, formality, have difference levels of importance in different cultures. Lens number two focusses on how people define themselves and their relationship with

others – we often speak about “*I*” cultures and “*We*” cultures indicating whether the individual or the group has primacy within the culture. Lens number three highlights *how power and leadership* are distributed in cultures – whether people feel equal or unequal. Lens four focuses on a person’s degree of comfort in dealing with *uncertain or unknown situations*. Lens five notes a culture’s propensity to put more emphasis on *being or doing*. Lens six and seven highlight the different ways that *time* functions in a culture, emphasis on the short-term or long-term. And whether time seen as “clock time” to be measured incrementally or seen as “abundant time” and finally lens number eight looks at the way people orient themselves in *space* in relation to others. Finally, the 9th lens reminds us that within religious life sisters have been shaped by *different formation_cultures* that prevailed at different times. These formation cultures presented different images of God, understanding of Church, ways of praying etc. Studying these lenses helps sisters to understand culture and to grow in the ability to become intercultural.

2

The Challenge to Go Beyond

Becoming intercultural calls members of religious congregations to go beyond mere understanding and respecting other cultures; it is to allow themselves to be transformed by other cultures. Anthony Gittins presents intercultural living as a «theological or faith based-based undertaking»⁶. It is not just about living side by side, under the same roof as others... it requires the transformation or conversion of all involved⁷. It is not easy he says and demands «graciousness, diplomacy, compromise, mutual respect, serious dialogue and the development of a common and sustained vision»⁸. Anthony Pernia former Superior General of the SVD congregation said the following: «Interculturality encourages and promotes people from different cultures to interact with each other and therefore mutually enrich and transform each other, the individual and the community as a whole»⁹. He then identifies 3 characteristics of a genuine intercultural community:

- a. *Recognition of other cultures* – allowing minority cultures to be visible in the community.
- b. *Respect for cultural difference* – avoiding any attempt to subsume the minority cultures into the majority cultures.
- c. *Promoting a healthy interaction between cultures* – seeking to create a climate whereby each culture allows itself to be transformed or enriched by the other culture¹⁰.

For Pernia, interculturality can therefore be described as «mutual multi-directional exchange and enrichment»¹¹. We can only really “enter” into another culture when we have first “exited” from our own culture. We have to break away from the ethnocentrism that binds us to our first culture. We have to constantly check with whose ears are we listening and with whose eyes are we hearing? We need to alter the cultural lens through which we see and hear others because communication must flow out from a genuine commitment to laying down our life for others.

3

A Spirituality to Sustain an Intercultural Journey

The process of acquiring an intercultural identity is a process of transformation. The Asian theologian Peter C. Phan says that the development of an intercultural identity is grounded in what he calls to the state of “*marginality*”. This occurs when a person is able to stand poised between two different worlds while often experiencing an

acute sense of displacement, loneliness, self-doubt, isolation, and restlessness. According to Phan *marginality* is a state of being able to live in what he calls the «betwixt and between»¹². We can have this kind of experience when living in a political, social, cultural or linguistic context that is not our own. It is also the common experience of any person or group who lives at the edge – at a periphery, a border or a boundary.

Sacred Scripture provide multiple examples of what it means to be transformed by entering into the culture of another: from the lives of Abraham and Sarah, Ruth and Naomi and in the life of Jesus and the experiences of the early Church. Abraham and Sarah are seen as model immigrants who demonstrate «how to live at peace with the host peoples of the land and share ownership of the land»¹³. They show deep respect for the people and for local practices and traditions. Abraham always sees himself as a “ger” or resident alien and he never ceases to see himself as a stranger in a land of promise (*Gn 23, 4*) and always respects the law of the land. The story of Ruth and Naomi is another wonderful parable of the transformation involved in becoming intercultural. We remember the words of Ruth to Naomi as they leave Moab and return to Judah “Do not ask me to abandon you or forsake you” she says. «Wherever you go I shall go. Wherever you live, I will live. Your people shall be my people and your God will be my God too»¹⁴.

Conclusion

Finally our growth as intercultural persons can be sustained by the example of Christ who was truly the marginal person par excellence. St. Paul tells us that within his godhead Jesus moved to a new state of being: «...being in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet»¹⁵.

Within his society, Jesus was a stranger even to his own people. The letter to the Hebrews expresses this state of being as follows: «Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured»¹⁶.

The example of Jesus' life is calling each of us, to go outside the camp as he did to be among those who are different, to meet strangers and foreigners. Jesus was the marginal person who broke down all barriers between Jew and Gentile, between male and female, between slave and free. He was the reconciler who could move between two or more worlds and also within each world. He was the one who could stand in the breach.

During these past years the UISG in collaboration with members of the Divine Word Congregation and their sister congregation the Sister Servants of the Holy Spirit have offered in person and online training programs to teams of 4-5 persons including formators and leaders from almost 120 congregations. By the end of the 8 or 10 day sessions the congregational teams have developed a congregational plan. The content of the program includes the elements that I have outlined in this paper and many more.

Becoming intercultural required undertaking a faith-filled journey to become a person, who respects all cultures; a person who can appreciate difference and is ultimately able to negotiate different worlds and to be transformed by them. In conclusion may we learn more about and constantly celebrate the rich and luxurious diversity of cultures that we find within our communities and places of ministry? In the words of the Irish poet John O' Donoghue may we grow in the realization that: «... our friends were once strangers. Somehow at a particular time they came from the distance into our lives. Their arrival seemed so accidental and contingent. Now our life is unimaginable without them»¹⁷.



Endnotes

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The Need for Formation to Move from Multiculturalism to Interculturality

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Abstract

This work tries to create awareness and orientation in the area of intercultural community of consecrated life. It is divided into six parts: 1. Multiculturalism, interculturality and transculturality, 2. The necessity for interculturality in the formation of consecrated life, 3. Opening up for intercultural living in formation, 4. The contrast between collectivistic and individualistic cultures, 5. Some challenges in encountering other cultures and 6. Intercultural encounters.

Keywords

Community of consecrated life – Multiculturalism – Interculturality – Transculturality – Formation

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Introduction

Interculturality is not actually something new. However, intercultural living does not succeed automatically. Yet, it can be learned and cultivated. Interculturality is often associated with the terms multiculturalism and transculturality and these terms are sometimes even confused with each other. This makes it necessary to understand and differentiate these terms. Even though all three terms are based on culture and describe forms of social coexistence, they differ from each other. While multiculturalism clearly distinguishes itself from interculturality and transculturality, the definitions of interculturality and transculturality are not necessarily distinctively different: they overlap.

1

Multiculturalism, interculturality and transculturality

1.1

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism describes forms of social coexistence of national and cultural groups. Cultural diversity within the different national groups is recognised. Individual groups are understood as independent groups with equal rights within the society. There is no strive for Assimilation. The model of a multicultural society primarily describes the phenomena of living side by side. When talking about multiculturalism, the focus is on living side by side with one another. Consequently, there is striving for tolerance, understanding, acceptance and avoidance of conflict between the different cultural groups. Multicultural approaches support the desire for cultural diversity and try to create understanding between the different cultural groups. There is no striving for togetherness here. The cultural groups meet each other with tolerance and respect, but without entering into a process of interaction or exchange with one another.

There is the need to move from multiculturalism to interculturality in the formation of consecrated life. This is because a multicultural approach or a multicultural concept forms the basis for coexistence without conflicts in multicultural societies. But in my opinion, this is not suitable for the formation of consecrated life since the phenomena of mixing up with each other and the exchange of cultures and ideas are not topics of multiculturalism. However, these phenomena are central in the formation of consecrated life, where members have different cultural backgrounds. And this is because consecrated life is about togetherness and not about living side by side.

1.2

Interculturality

Interculturality refers, among other things, to encounters and exchanges between cultures – while preserving one's own cultural identity; Interculturality perceives and appreciates the cultural diversity of people; Interculturality recognizes that people are equal in many ways – and therefore works to overcome racist, sexist and other inhuman attitudes; interculturality reveals how much people and cultures influence one another – and challenges us to critically question our own lifestyles and cultures; interculturality sees every single person as a distinctive person with his or her own dignity.

Interculturality goes beyond the boundaries of cultures and thereby also pays special attention to the diverse cultural formations within a culture. Byram puts it this way: «...interculturalism involves a conscious capacity to “mediate” between two or more cultures, to observe similarities and conflicts, to generate a relationship between oneself and others, and to accept the role of a mediator»¹.

The word *inter* in the term interculturality refers to a special form of relationships and interactions which, on the level of group phenomena, symbolise the develop-

ment of a new culture. Finally, interculturality opens up new possibilities of perception by paying attention to the space *between* cultures. A redesign of a new culture should be possible in this room *between* the cultures. I call it the *third culture*. This is not just about differences and similarities, but above all about overlays, mutual dependencies and mutual penetration of boundaries and contacts.

And this is what is expected in the intercultural formation of consecrated life:

- To interact with the different cultures
- To learn from the different cultures
- To be ready to question one's own culture critically
- To be in the position to see one's own culture, not as the ultimate/best culture, but to perceive one's own culture as one from many other cultures
- To be willing to give something up from one's own culture and be ready to learn something from another culture or from other cultures

1.3 Transculturality

Transculturality as such, means that the encounter between two different or even opposing cultures can consequently lead to a blurring of the boundaries, but possibly also to the elimination of these boundaries². Even though I pointed out at the beginning that interculturality and transculturality cannot be clearly separated, there is still an important difference between the two terms: with interculturality, the relationship between two different positions and perspectives is emphasised more strongly, while with transculturality, more emphasis is placed on the *common*, both on the similarities that exist "beyond" cultural differences, as well as on those similarities, that arise as a product of intercultural interaction³.

Transculturality emphasises the similarities between cultures, and the distinction between what is one's own culture and what is from a foreign culture is often no longer possible or hardly possible. Although transculturality can be seen as a concept that tries to grasp a transitional social form of coexistence and can provide valuable suggestions for shaping social coexistence and as such consecrated formation, interculturality fits better into the formation of consecrated life. Because in order to treat people equally, it may be necessary to make differences – that is, to treat unequal things unequally.

2 The necessity for interculturality in the formation of consecrated life

Interculturality means more than multiculturalism in the sense of a cultural diversity, also more than transculturality in the sense of crossing over certain cultures. This distinction is of great importance in the formation of people in consecrated life with different cultural backgrounds. Because they should not lose their own culture and identity, but bring them as an enrichment into the community.

In summary, *multiculturalism* emphasises on living side by side, *transculturality* stresses what is common in the different cultures and *interculturality* is comprehensive because it pays attention to both similarities and differences in different cultures. Therefore, though both multiculturalism and transculturality are good basis for living together, it is important in the formation of consecrated life to move to interculturality. Because it is the differences in cultures that become a challenge and an enrichment for living together and not the similarities. It remains a challenge to keep the uniqueness of the different cultures in a community and at the same time to find a common way of living together. This calls for openness.

3

Opening up for intercultural living in formation

To be able to live in an intercultural community, it is important to be open-minded and to be ready to accept and learn from other cultures. Learning from other cultures first of all demands, that we respect other cultures and that we are convinced of being enriched by them. This presupposes that we acknowledge the dignity of people from other cultures and that we accept to live with the diversity of cultures in our said community. Such an attitude leads to mutual respect and creates the basics for good intercultural interactions.

3.1 Diversity in formation communities

An intercultural community needs to accept diversity and diverse ways of doing things to achieve a good intercultural life. Diversity is according to Harrison and Sin⁴, the collective degree of differences between members of a social group⁵. It characterises the extent to which a group is colourfully mixed up. This colourful group can differ in terms of spirituality, gender, generation, skin colour, education, culture and many other factors. The cultural diversity stays however in the background.

The recognition of these differences is very significant in a community, because it has been proved that the way people perceive diversity can have a major impact on the way diversity influences individuals and groups. Any kind of diversity can demonstrably have positive or negative effects. The good news is that, the more individuals or groups show a positive attitude towards diversity, the more it becomes beneficial and less detrimental.

Diversity is inevitable in intercultural living. Thomas Aquinas says in his famous and well-known *Summa Theologica*, God loves and blesses diversity, because it belongs to his creation⁶. For a successful intercultural living, it is necessary to allow diversity, since it can be a chance and an opportunity for community life if room is made for members of a community to bring in their different cultures. However, this cultural diversity only becomes a valuable resource if communities make the effort to accept the different cultures in their midst. Because diversity is not just what we expect from it but also what we make out of it. Hiding differences between cultures is of little help. In order to develop the potential of diversity, it is important to simultaneously emphasise on the similarities and differences in cultures.

3.2 Dealing with differences within an intercultural formation community

Accepting and learning to live with diversity in an intercultural community means we have to be able to live with differences. One of the important things is to have the ability of *not denying differences*. It often happens that we avoid naming differences between cultures, fearing that this could foster conflict and xenophobia. Differences between cultures are natural. Their denial is not the way to eliminate conflicts in the long term. Differences should therefore be acknowledged and taken seriously, but without the usual derogatory connotations. In this way, they can be addressed and common ways for living together can be found⁷.

Furthermore, it is important to *consider differences as a source of enrichment*. It is good to be aware of the fact that differences can not only present challenges but can also offer opportunities and enrichment in intercultural communities.

Additionally, *intercultural dialogue should be encouraged*. A competent approach to cultural differences in an intercultural community requires not only the addressing of problems and irritations that arise from misunderstandings, but also a dialogue on controversial validity claims of values, etc., or simply of communication rules, because a mutual understanding can only be deepened through dialogue.

It is therefore vital, that *intercultural dialogue is direct and concrete*. There is the danger of not dealing directly with foreigners when it comes to issues concerning them, but rather relying on read theories and reports of the media, which can lead to prejudices. We cannot remain by the description of others, their culture and practices that we get from the media, if dialogue is to succeed in a community. We have to speak directly with those concerned in order to get to know and understand them and the differences between us better.

Dialogue about differences between cultures *requires the willingness to change and rethink*. People in dialogue should at the same time be encouraged to open themselves to change. Intercultural dialogue is a mutual learning process: everyone learns something from each other's culture and gives something out from one's own culture. This interplay of different cultural aspects in dialogue and living together leads to changes or renewal of all concerned. And this openness is necessary because intercultural dialogue can only bear fruit if renewal of cultures is allowed. All these being said, it is useful when dealing with intercultural differences to become conscious of the fact that our behaviour is shaped and influenced by our own cultures and therefore allow rethinking.

4

The contrast between collectivistic and individualistic cultures

Living in an intercultural community, it is very significant to know the patterns of behaviour of collectivistic and individualistic cultures. This is because the differences between these two are very important to understand how culture influences a person's perception and behaviour in a community⁸. But it is also important to mention that cultures are not always divided in to these extremes. People from these two cultural forms will have different behaviours, because

«...when individualists and collectivists meet, they bring to the encounter different social attitudes, moral values and behavioural inclinations. Their cognitive styles will differ as will the manner in which they communicate, particularly with respect to how they express their emotions and wishes. How they act, including their non-verbal behaviour, will also differ as a function of their core value orientation»⁹.

In *collective societies or cultures*, people define themselves as part of the group and therefore place group goals over individual ones. Whereas in *individualistic societies or cultures*, people consider themselves as separate entities and are therefore primarily interested in their own personal needs¹⁰.

Individualistic cultures promote an independent understanding of self. In order to achieve the cultural goal of independence, one has to understand himself as an individual whose behaviour is meaningful in relation to his own thoughts, feelings and actions and not through the feelings, thoughts and actions of others¹¹.

Collective cultures promote a mutually dependent (interdependent) understanding of self. The experience of interdependence implies that one perceives himself as part of a broader social relationship and recognises that one's own behaviour is determined by others. He also realises that his behaviour is largely structured by and depends on the feelings and thoughts of the people he is in relation with¹².

People from collective cultures attach great importance to community and solidarity. It is therefore important for them to maintain harmony and to ensure that no one loses his/her face. People from individualistic cultures give relatively high priority to their individual goals, and their identities are mainly defined by their personal characteristics¹³. The table below shows some other differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

| Individualistic cultures | Collectivistic cultures |
|---|---|
| Social status should be judged by performance. People who perform well should not be hindered by their origin to rise socially. | People accept hierarchies and status differences, even if these are not determined by the current performance but rather through age and tradition. |
| Although harmony is important, honesty and straightforwardness are valued during discussions. Status differences play only a minor role here. | Disputes are to be avoided in daily social interactions, especially if they would lead to the loss of face of one of the participants. |
| At least the ethical ideal exists, that all people should be treated equally and there should not be a difference between Ingroup and Outgroup | In the allocation of resources, differences are made between Ingroups and Outgroups. People of the Ingroups receive preferential treatment and especially relatives are actively supported in their careers |
| Moral behaviour is oriented on one's own and less on the expectations of the group. Immoral behaviour leads to feelings of guilt and personal responsibility. | Transgressions and acts of immorality lead to loss of face in front of the group and feelings of shame both to the perpetrator and to the members of the group and the family as a whole. |

If people from a collectivistic culture find themselves for the first time in an individualistic culture and they receive little or no support from their community, they would probably experience a much worse loss of identity than people from an individualistic culture under the same circumstances. Cut off from family, groups, and loyal friends, they would lose the connections that previously determined who they were. Because in a collectivist culture, identification with the group gives one sense of belonging, offers a range of values, a network of people who take care of themselves and ensure security¹⁴. On the other hand, it would be uncomfortable or too narrow for people from individualistic cultures if they were to *constantly* live with a community in a collectivistic culture. They would lack their *privacy*. It is therefore, necessary in intercultural communities to pay attention to this phenomenon of collectivism and individualism in order to understand each other and to try to find a common basis of going about things.

Countries that have a high degree of individualism are the Anglo-Saxon countries, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries. Collectivistic cultures are mostly found in parts of Africa, Asia and South America. Individualistic cultures are in the minority and collectivist cultures are in the majority with an amount of over 70 % of the world population¹⁵.

It is good to be aware of these differences, but of course, the level of collectivism and individualism varies not only among different countries, but also within a particular country. In addition, individualistic and collectivistic orientations also depend on the situation in which people find themselves and what stimuli are present. It is therefore, possible to find individuals in an individualistic culture having many traits of a collectivistic culture and vice versa.

5

Some challenges in encountering other cultures

Being able to live a successful intercultural life has also to do with the ability to have the courage to address issues. Because the mere confrontation with the *differentness* of a person (that is, in the sense of an objective fact based on cultural differences) can lead to aggressiveness, condemnation or rejection. This is of course, not

always the case. In some areas (Food, Aesthetics, Art, etc.), being different is often readily accepted – it raises curiosity, attractiveness and interest. However, things are different when *differentness* meets deep-rooted values, traditions, customs and habits that make up our identity. When these things are in play, *differentness* can trigger violent reactions. An ethnocentric reflex emerges. We turn to consider some of the behaviours of the different person to be immoral, shocking or offensive because they violate values we are deeply attached to. Such behaviours question certain principles on which our identity is based and they are therefore seen as an attack on us. We think this justifies moral disapproval and condemnation as a reaction or an answer¹⁶.

The point is about being open in our encounters with others and about our perceptions about them. Because if we persist in our own position and we expect the same ideas from others, we deny their originality and freedom and by so doing transform them into a subordinate or an object. This makes it very necessary and inevitable to deal with matters such as strangeness and prejudices in intercultural communities.

5.1 Strangeness

One of the big challenges in encountering people from other cultures is strangeness. The stranger in the classical sense is the one who comes from afar, unknown and unfamiliar. However, he/she must be close enough to be experienced as foreign, because people you do not know about cannot even be foreign to you¹⁷.

Looking at things from a sociological perspective, strangeness is everything that is unknown to us. When people meet in intercultural communities, their cultures are initially mutually strange to each other. The feeling of strangeness is therefore programmed in intercultural communities. Crossing the threshold between what is familiar to us, to something that is strange, always brings a risk, because the new thing we are going to encounter is not only uncertain to us but also changes us. It is therefore important in intercultural communities not to ignore or deny the existence of these realities, but to make them open and accessible for discussions in order to be able to find common means and ways of living harmoniously with each other. Encountering strangers or people from other cultures goes beyond learning a foreign language. It is also about understanding foreign cultures and changing perspectives¹⁸.

5.2 Prejudices

Prejudices are usually judgments that are made without verifying their validity on the basis of facts. These judgments usually have a pejorative and discriminatory tendency. Prejudices become a sort of defence mechanism. There are sometimes negative prejudices and hostile feelings towards others who think differently when people feel that their daily routines and well-established patterns of thought and behaviour may be disturbed¹⁹. These negative or hostile opinions sometimes arise just because a person belongs to a particular group. He/she is assumed to have the unsound practices which are attributed to that group²⁰.

Based on the points mentioned above, prejudices become a challenge in intercultural living which needs to be addressed, because in the encounter of people from different cultures, such ideas and attitudes are almost always present on both sides and they influence the interaction among these people. What I find interesting, or rather dangerous for intercultural living in communities is the fact, that people usually assume that they themselves are free of prejudices²¹.

Religious are not immune to this danger and since individuals cannot clear these social prejudices automatically, this remains a challenge when people from different cultures come together. Therefore, it is important that religious communities are aware of this phenomenon and to make it a point to talk about it – thus not to make it a taboo topic. Only then will it be possible to break down such prejudices.

6

Intercultural encounters

Intercultural encounters are delicate and need to be accompanied with care. This is because when people from different cultures come together, different worldviews meet. This makes misunderstandings, misinterpretations and difficulties inevitable, especially due to the fact that each partner takes it for granted that his/her worldview is the only *right* and *normal* one.

This is a challenge for both locals and newcomers in a particular culture, initially, for the newcomer who is in a new culture. In view of the foreign customs and traditions, he/she can no longer rely on his/her usual thinking and feels impaired in his/her ability to act in his/her self-confidence. Some react with a *defence* that they assimilate permanently in their behaviour. Others accept this *reality of differences*, create diverse correspondences through which they regain their ability to act and their self-confidence. Also, the locals are irritated by the behaviour of the other, which is foreign to him/her. Experiences of strangeness are made on both sides and it is advisable to exchange these experiences and remain in dialogue²². The next point can be helpful in trying to understand each other.

6.1 Living in a new culture

Intercultural living presupposes that at least one person or a group of people have moved from one culture to live in a different culture. This makes it necessary to pay particular attention to the phenomenon of arriving in a new culture. Nowadays it is easy and fast to move from one country to another, thus from one culture to another. However, the process of *arriving* in the host country takes much longer than we might think. Diana de Vallescar Palanca says that one's own organism has to get used to the new environment and it takes an average of six months to get physically adapted to the new environment. Our body shows its mental state in body language and begins to react and to adapt to the new rhythms, the types of nutrition, climatic conditions, etc. The psyche, however, needs a bit longer and this can lead to a cultural shock. Nobody really knows what we have left behind and what we are to expect in the new culture and environment²³.

A modulation begins between the near (here) and the far (there). Such coordinates fulfil a new psychic meaning and lead to a redefinition of a person's affective topography. It is as if the environment, things and people impress him/her in a new way due to the memories, expectations, fears and emotional connections that he/she is more or less aware of²⁴. In this context, he/she almost involuntarily strives to regain his/her *there* (where he/she came from) with its mental and affective schemes and behaviours. In his/her *here* (our current situation), his/her homesickness, which is usually strong like never before, appears to be part of his/her life and seem to build his/her new identity. The new cultural situation begins to influence the personality of the person concerned and his/her way of relating to others. His/her reactions and perceptions, how he/she is being perceived by others and what he/she has learned are sometimes confused²⁵. In this situation, it is important that a community shows concern and understanding to the one involved and it is necessary that he/she is assisted in a way the community finds appropriate to help him/her arrive *here*, also emotionally and psychologically.

6.2 Culture shock

Culture shock is a psychic state where suddenly all the known values and patterns of behaviour seem to have lost their validity for the individual in the foreign cultural environment. The symptoms include homesickness, depression, nervousness, exaggerated cleanliness, withdrawal, unexplainable crying attacks, loss of ability to work

effectively, and aggressive behaviour in the new environment. Culture shock is not a disease, but a defence reaction against the influences of a foreign culture²⁶. The bigger the difference between the culture of origin and the culture on the ground, the more difficult it becomes to adapt²⁷.

Every culture shapes its members by teaching them what is desired, allowed or prohibited. What is learned is like an equipment that gives the individual an orientation in his/her everyday life and helps him/her to behave as expected. When someone enters a new culture, his/her *cultural equipment* which has worked well until then is questioned. His/her behaviour, core values and worldviews are challenged and he/she receives a culture shock. In the new environment, the individual feels that the usual problem-solving and decision-making strategies that have worked well for him/her all the time in his/her own culture have lost their effectiveness, because things are going on differently in the new culture. This can lead to a shock. His/her world of interaction becomes uncertain, which gives him/her a certain discomfort or an emotional or physical restlessness that reflects in frustration, anger, depression, lethargy, aggression or illness²⁸. It is very important that a person in such a situation has someone to talk to. Sharing with others who are as well new in a culture and are mostly going through similar experiences is also helpful. This gives them the feeling that they are not alone in such a situation and lets them know that certain experiences are *normal* when encountering a new culture, and people from a new culture. This can be very supportive during this time.

Culture shock is not only for newcomers in a culture, it is also experienced by the local people when they come into contact with the culture of the new person in the community. However, the intensity varies, because the local people are favoured by a known framework of actions as well as by the possibility of having easier access to advice and support from colleagues, friends, relatives etc., which makes them less vulnerable²⁹. Generally speaking, people who have lived, worked, studied in other cultures or travelled a lot to other cultures will have fewer problems with culture shock than the others.

Conclusion

For a successful intercultural living in a community, it is important to be first of all aware that there is no automatism in this regard, but that it requires sensitivity and needs to be developed. Intercultural sensitivity is not natural, and therefore its appropriation needs special attention³⁰. Martin Üffing sums this up and says that interculturality does not just happen by putting together under the same roof people of different cultures. Rather it is something that needs to be consciously created, intentionally promoted, carefully cared for and attentively nurtured. It requires certain community structures, some basic personal attitudes and a strong missionary spirituality³¹. It is therefore necessary to pay particular attention to the points below.

- Intercultural formation is an opportunity, and yet it remains a challenge that requires determination
- The local culture should not be neglected, but paid attention to, since interculturality doesn't exist in a vacuum
- It should become clear to all formators and those in formation that intercultural formation is a process that demands efforts, both from local and from foreign formators or those in formation
- It is important to ensure that the challenges associated with intercultural formation are not left unattended to, but are discussed
- It is important to treat other people/cultures and the other sex with respect
- It is good to understand other people and their cultures. Because Henry Ford said: The secret of success is understanding the other person's point of view

- The ability to question one's own cultural values and practices is also of great importance. Because as Hofstede says: The inability to question one's own cultural practices and values evidently creates high conflict potential when members of different cultures have to live and get along with each other

In intercultural formation, it should be possible to rephrase the message in the letter to the Galatians. Instead of the sentence: There are no longer Jews and Greeks, no more slaves and free people, no man and woman; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (*Gal* 3, 28), we should be able to say: There are no longer formators and those in formation from Africa, America, Asia, Europe and Oceania, because we are all one in Christ Jesus and are fellow sisters and brothers, not in the sense that the individual loses his or her identity, but in the sense that living together is possible despite the different culture



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20. Cf. R. BERGLER – B. SIX, *Stereotype und Vorurteile*, in G. MALETZKE (ed.), *Interkulturelle Kommunikation: Zur Interaktion zwischen Menschen verschiedener Kulturen*, Westdeutscher Verlag, Opladen 1996, 116.

21. Cf. H. NICKLAS, *Klammern kollektiver Identität – Zur Funktion von Vorurteilen*, in NICKLAS – MÜLLER – KORDES (eds.), *Interkulturell*, 109.
22. Cf. H. KORDES, *Interkultureller Umgang mit Fremdheitserfahrungen*, in NICKLAS – MÜLLER – KORDES (eds.), *Interkulturell*, 309.
23. Cf. VALLESCAR PALANCA, *Ordensleben interkulturell: Eine neue Vision*, 81.
24. Cf. *ivi*.
25. Cf. *ivi*.
26. Cf. E. BROZINSKY-SCHWABE, *Interkulturelle Kommunikation: Missverständnisse – Verständigung*, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Wiesbaden 2011, 212.
27. Cf. R. OERTER – L. MONTADA, *Entwicklungspsychologie* Beltz, Basel 2008, 114.
28. Cf. VALLESCAR PALANCA, *Ordensleben interkulturell: Eine neue Vision*, 91.
29. Cf. *ibid.*, 93.
30. Cf. M. PIAGE, *Education for the intercultural experience*, Intercultural Press, Yarmouth 1993, 21.
31. Cf. M. ÜFFING (ed), *Interculturality*, Roscommon 25 – Verlag Franz Schmitt, Siegburg 2013, 196-197.



Living in Multiculturality, Learning Interculturality in Catholic Higher Education

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Abstract

This paper presents the Sophia University Institute in Italy as a case study. From the analysis carried out and from what the students emphasised, it is clear that placing a circuit of mutual gifting at the centre of the educational project can give rise to a relationship of communion that forms the basis and foundation of intercultural dialogue. Starting from an experience of brotherhood there is then dialogue, mutual questioning and learning. This relationship becomes the very place of thinking that then favours the emergence and unfolding of one's identity, together with a more complex and richer vision of reality. This journey can be facilitated by participation in spaces and scenarios of meta-communication, marked by relationships of trust and symmetry, which offer everyone the reciprocal gift of the language with which they are able to reveal the uniqueness and treasures of their own culture, and able to make themselves understood by others. Finally, discovering oneself to be part of a broader historical project, such as that of universal brotherhood, and knowing oneself to be called to wisdom, as well as to knowledge, supplies greater meaning and strength with which to face the challenges that cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue entail.

Keywords

Converging identities – Communion – Educational pact – Interculturality – Meta-communication – Catholic Higher Education

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* Translated from the original
Italian by Polly Brooks

Introduction

The harsh experience of the limit has always presented itself to us in its dual valence of limen or limes, of frontier or threshold, of wound or slit¹. Opening up to diversity means breaking through the wall, opening up the horizon, risking the unprecedented possible in order to find, beyond the acrid taste of fear, the reasons for hope. Investing in an intercultural education certainly means recognising the intrinsic value of diversity, the possibility we are given by the other from a culture different from our own to discover aspects of reality that would escape us, but it is also humble and wise awareness that the questions, challenges and limits that the other, in his unfathomable otherness, will pose are a gift; limits that can become borders to cross in order to get to know new worlds, in growing awareness of the perennial incompleteness of our own thinking².

Intercultural education is an irreplaceable tool for social coexistence and for the formation of the individual in the understanding, appreciation and respect of different cultures and the plural, rich and multiple context in which they find themselves. It can also be a fundamental element in fostering the construction of societies that are more cohesive and more aware of the treasure that the great variety of cultures of which they are increasingly composed represents³.

1

A point of observation

These pages constitute a small part of the research on intercultural training in universities, and looks specifically at the experience of those charismatic and prophetic realities that have arisen in the bosom of the Catholic Church, which are the ecclesial and lay movements⁴. A particularly plural reality, that of the Focolare Movement⁵ with its global presence and 23 distinct vocations of all generations is, in the awareness of the differences between them, presented here as a case of analysis. One could say that the entire Focolare Movement can be seen as a single global pedagogical project, with one focus: “Learning to live together”⁶. Of particular interest is its fledgling university: the *Istituto Universitario Sophia* (IUS)⁷, in the province of Florence.

This paper brings together a plurality of voices, as it is intended to be anchored in the experience of the students and their words on the subject; it has therefore been left to them to highlight the discoveries and challenges that this second and third cycle educational pathway brings with it. We wish, however, to emphasise the awareness that this is a university still at the beginning of its life and therefore attended by small groups; but that perhaps, precisely at the root of the charismatic thrust from which it draws its origins, it allows us to glimpse hermeneutic traces and keys for re-thinking higher education from the perspective of interculturality.

Since its foundation in 2008, the Sophia University Institute has presented itself as an academic space where, on the one hand, the heritage of the Focolare’s educational experience in the world and, on the other, the work of schools of thought developed within it in the fields of politics, economics, social sciences and theology, converge. This makes it a university institution open to plurality, whose aim is to develop a path that combines life and thought, as the main way to encounter Wisdom. All this with an interdisciplinary approach (as a basis and goal), as demonstrated by the very nature of its first academic proposal whereby the only degree awarded was the Master’s Degree in the Culture of Unity. Despite the distinction of the individual disciplinary pathways, which arose subsequently, the first degree maintained a space of its own and the interdisciplinary approach spread to other areas.

Even though from the very first cohort it showed itself to be a multicultural academic community – given that the students come from all five continents – it could be

said that it is moving towards an educative ecology in the training of interculturality, not presenting it as a given, but as the very purpose of its institutional mission, so that it is able to “arouse and cultivate intercultural *formae mentis*”⁸; while still requiring constant updating and consequently to be expressed in the design of the programme of study, the composition of the teaching staff and in the spaces for academic discussion.

2

Astonishment⁹

The question of one’s own identity becomes pressing in the – often painful – experience of otherness: when one discovers another, close to oneself, an *other* who expresses themselves in a way that is difficult to understand, who acts in a different way, who tells a story of the world that begins with other words and gives priority to other names, or when their presence and their actions somehow lead one to question one’s own certainties.

The first experience is therefore one of surprise, astonishment or uncertainty; this is experienced at Sophia from the outset, both in the completely international daily life of the residencies, and in lessons. At the end of the course, and precisely during the defence of her degree thesis, A. from Burundi recounts: “during the first year of my master’s degree, in the intercultural communication class, the lecturer asked a Hungarian student whether she identified more with Hungarian nationality or with being a European citizen. Without hesitation, she replied: ‘I feel more European than Hungarian. This answer really shook me. The concept of identity had always been so narrow in my understanding of it and meant something close to me, a family, a nation and a culture. Europe seemed like a huge continent to me, which for my Hungarian classmate, was actually something close enough to signify her identity...!’”¹⁰.

From this the realisation that recognising the value of the other is what gives rise to the opening of the ‘door’ of our being. In fact, identity, that which gives meaning to existence and tends to bring out the inherent uniqueness of every human being, is fundamentally a relational fact, as is made clear by the intense words of Giuseppe Maria Zanghì: “The identity of me with myself I construct, therefore, in the relationship with the other. The diversity I have to cross to reach myself is not empty space, but is *others*. Without others I will never be myself”¹¹. In fact, the initial amazement gradually led A. not only to discover a new dimension of identity – as a world of dialogue that builds itself and reveals itself in encounter and acceptance – but also that dimension that Castells calls *planning*, as it allows one to ‘compose’ one’s own history¹². This experience has, in fact, led A. to direct their course of study, as well as their life commitment, in the work they have undertaken in favour of African integration and in the contribution they are making to it by building networks and training young leaders in the countries of that continent.

When the experience of interculturality becomes communitarised and shared throughout the academic community, it is noticeable how ‘convergent identities’ emerge, uniquenesses that, when faced with the risk of confrontation with otherness, instead of becoming entrenched in defence of its own identity, glimpse therein the relational space of the encounter:

“The fixed core on which this identity rests is not determined by a particular custom or symbolic manifestation, but by the force itself, the power that comes from the relationship. Everything can change, as long as the relationship remains. Not any relationship, but that which ranges from recognition to appreciation, to mutual giving”¹³.

3

At the centre is the relationship

The core of the educational proposal lies in placing the relationship at the centre, but not just any relationship; rather, a relationship of communion, in which knowledge, exchange and dialogue are then sought, in the awareness that for this to exist, as Donati states: “Cognitive, evaluative and symbolic operations are needed that are relational, and specifically capable of establishing a circuit of reciprocal gifts”¹⁴.

From the very first days at Sophia, a proposal is made that characterises the educational pact¹⁵. A pact that is signed by all the members of the academic community the moment they become part of it and that could be expressed in the following words of Chiara Lubich: “I felt that I was created as a gift of love for you and you were created as a gift of love for me”¹⁶. This entails being open to a positive relationality of mutual recognition and esteem, fostered by the places of meeting and listening and by academic life as a whole¹⁷. Identity dynamism is explained by a new grammar; in which, not only *I am because you are*, but *I am so that you may be*, and this forms the core of the relationship between all members: students, professors and staff, each in their own role¹⁸.

In addition to the personal commitment to a corresponding practice, the Pact is supported in particular by an exercise known to all as *Sharing*. Twice a week the academic community gathers, and from an initial cue – pages from Holy Scripture or wisdom texts from different cultures¹⁹, put forward and illustrated by one of the participants – each person has the opportunity to resonate with what they have heard, relating it to their own life, their experience or culture of origin, their religious background or the life of the Institute itself. In this way, teachers, students and staff foster a space for reciprocal listening, but above all they take the courage to make their own voices heard, breaking, in the realm of interpersonal relations, asymmetrical patterns that – if for no other reason than their roles – might prevail in an academic environment. Thus, in reciprocity and diversity, they have a transformational experience²⁰.

This same experience is recorded in the words of H., a Muslim, Yemeni student who recently obtained a doctorate in pedagogy:

“The most important aspect for me was the reciprocity with both the other students and the lecturers [...]. Being of the Islamic religion, this was particularly important for me, as I too was able to make my contribution through meeting and sharing. A contribution that was valued and welcomed as a positive contribution, just as it was valuable for me to listen to others, their thoughts and experiences, always with a view to mutual respect, knowledge and enrichment”²¹.

This reveals the fruitfulness of giving life to meeting spaces explicitly devoted to profound mutual knowledge²² and meta-communication²³, whose coordinates are symmetry, trust and the reciprocal gift of words.

4

Letting oneself be penetrated by the demands of the other

Learning the “*capacity for decentralisation*”: this implies as Portera indicates: “A serious investment in the area of empathy, understood as the capacity to put oneself in the other’s shoes (without losing oneself, but rather remaining in touch with oneself), congruence (internal and external) and unconditional *positive acceptance* (of oneself and of the other)”²⁴.

And in this regard we report here the voice of an Australian student: TG. She recounts her experience while participating in a meeting on the formation of human communities in the digital world: while the focus of the discussion on the digital age was emphasising the latest frontiers of artificial intelligence and questioning the

weight of technology in individualisation, and the issue of cyber security and privacy, some students from Madagascar had quietly introduced questions that seemed to her not to be random. These questions had aroused a certain unease in some participants. The questions were: “Where are the poor and the discarded in society in this vision we are being shown that looks like the big picture of the digital revolution?” Coming from a background in sociology and mass media studies, she allowed herself to be traversed by that question uttered almost in a whisper, and to be profoundly challenged by those views to the point of feeling it all so strongly that subsequently all her studies were focused on the theme of recognition in the digital world. From this encounter and deep, empathetic listening came the subject of her thesis in the political studies department: more than a category of thought, it was the need to recognise the vital experience that became the object of study.

Reciprocity gives rise to a communion that, in addition to qualifying the intercultural relationship, somehow becomes the locus of thought and enhances the re-signification – starting from this profound anthropological experience – of many concepts, but above all of the very reality of the world that surrounds us and that, through university studies, we want to look at and understand. That emerging relationship that arises from the encounter when what takes the floor is gifting and esteem, that ‘between’, that somehow defines the place of thinking²⁵.

Underlying this is something more than intercultural education: promoting a relationality that makes it possible to have a more complete and complex view of reality; encouraging – as Martha Nussbaum indicates – the development of a rationality that allows us to read the role of our nation in history, entails a better knowledge of ourselves²⁶; and in a “particular way a critical capacity and a propensity for self-criticism”²⁷; we can thus distinguish what is essential to our cultural practices, from what is superfluous, enabling a greater elaboration of our own tradition in its authenticity. Not, therefore, through an operation of reduction and analysis, but rather through an awareness of our common interdependence.

Openness to dialogue therefore implies openness to complexity, that is, to this way of looking at reality that keeps the different dimensions of existence linked, albeit distinct, and recognises that technology and care, development and history are intimately intertwined and must be looked at together; just as equal weight must be given to the multiple types of rationality and intelligence, sociability and management of relationships that characterise any given people, since culture is also and above all the way each human group relates to others, to itself, to God and to the cosmos, as well as the institutions, products and norms that flow from it.

5

Wisdom as a shared horizon²⁸

Another central element of intercultural education at Sophia University Institute is the shared search for a common horizon that is expected to emerge from the continuous interweaving of reflection, study and concretisation that leads to a manner of living that enlightens, and, in the words of the young Argentinean theologian Lucas Cerviño, “Gives form and ignition to a knowledge that springs from participation in the ultimate foundation of reality. It is therefore a knowledge that goes beyond a merely scientific or sensory knowledge, which involves the whole person”²⁹.

When the student representative, a young Belgian, was asked at the beginning of the academic year what the assumption that at Sophia thought and life are in mutual relationship meant to him, he expressed himself as follows:

“It is a continuous realisation that we are participating in a project that is bigger than ourselves, that goes beyond our limited way of looking at things (...) we learn to look at the relationships that were there before us and we learn to look

at the relationship as a horizon to be found in everything, in seeing the other, society and everyday life. The answer to the question of the encounter between life and thought is therefore not in the what, but in the how, and it is always to be re-discovered. Sophia teaches us that the encounter is always possible, it makes our eyes fresh and alert, in anticipation of the encounter that conceals a novelty, that wishes to narrate itself beyond the immediate and superficial limits that we sometimes find within us”³⁰.

Evident in this testimony is the development of what has been called relational reflexivity, i.e. in that one becomes capable of looking at the relationship, and of behaving with conscience towards it and taking care of it³¹.

Wisdom is thus presented as a horizon of meaning and a point of convergence. And as much as it can be an ongoing conquest, what Cerviño says is found to be true: “Intercultural dialogue can even become a spiritual experience, in the exchange of gifts, in openness to mystery, in intersubjective openness”³². because, as Pope Francis says, “when we experience the mystique of approaching others with the intention of seeking their good, we enlarge our interiority to receive the most beautiful gifts from the Lord”³³. Every time we encounter a human being in love, we put ourselves in a position to discover something new about God.

6

Prospects/challenges

If we affirm with Gardner that “intercultural education aims at the promotion of all the intelligences of all the pupils present in the classroom: body-kinesthetic, musical, social, interpersonal, intrapersonal-emotional, transcendental, aesthetic”³⁴, we cannot fail to recognise that our universities were born primarily in a European, Western, modern cultural matrix, centred in a type of rationality, in the verb, in writing, in transmission, individual-centred, and that, therefore, they still struggle to understand tribal or community-centred humans, symbolic and highly sensitive men and women; those who have what is known as spiral thinking and emotional intelligence; those who must use mainly images, tears and songs to express themselves.

In our view, what is needed are processes of training and reflexivity, new practices and new languages that run through the whole of teaching and that, for example, in performing evaluations take into account processes together with results; or, indeed, emphasise the connection between concepts and the life of society. Perhaps all this can be fostered if the multicultural dimension is more prominent within the teaching staff, the research groups, the staff, and if that reflectivity that makes the deepening of the intercultural dimension possible is promoted.

Conclusion

From the analysis carried out and from what the students emphasised, it is clear that placing a circuit of reciprocal gifting at the centre of the educational project can give rise to a relationship of communion that forms the basis and foundation of intercultural dialogue. We start from an experience of fellowship and then there is dialogue, reciprocal questioning and learning. This relationship becomes the very place of thinking that then favours both the manifestation and unfolding of one’s own identity, but also a more complex and richer vision of reality. This journey can be favoured by participation in spaces and scenarios of meta-communication, marked by relationships of trust and symmetry, which allow everyone the reciprocal gift of the word with which to reveal the uniqueness and treasures of one’s own culture, and make oneself known to others. Finally, discovering oneself to be part of a broader historical

project, such as that of universal brotherhood, and knowing oneself to be called to wisdom, as well as knowledge, provides more meaning and gives us the strength to face the challenges that cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue entail.

In conclusion, it seems illuminating to us to quote the words of the student representative again: “Both life and thought lead us to de-construct ‘useless’ constructs that we all hold at the level of personal life experiences, structures of thinking, cultural conditioning (...), things, which we discover to be burdensome and, at times, obstructive, until they are transformed by the encounter” so that we are convinced that it is precisely the university that is a privileged place for training in interculturality, and the case examined we believe has shown how higher education, characterised by a strong culture of encounter, does not only concern people, but the disciplines and cultures themselves.



Endnotes

1. “It is about discovering the meaning and forms of the limit in which one exists, of the limit that one is, in order to find in it and from it the way to the encounter – to which we are irresistibly called – with which/with whom one is beyond one’s own limit. Without the limit in which one exists being destroyed”. Translated from the Italian original: P. CODA, *Il limite come questione. Un’introduzione*, “Sophia. Ricerche sui fondamenti e la correlazione dei saperi” 3 (2011) 2, 157.
2. Cf. D. FARES, *Note per un pensiero ‘incompleto’*, “Civiltà Cattolica” (2022) I/4117, 82-89. It is becoming more and more evident today that “a true evangelical hermeneutic is needed in order to better understand life, the world, men, not a synthesis but a spiritual atmosphere of research and certainty based on the truths of reason and faith. Philosophy and theology allow one to acquire the convictions that structure and fortify the intelligence and enlighten the will... but all this is fruitful only if one does it with an open mind and on one’s knees. The theologian who is complacent in his complete and concluded thought is mediocre. The good theologian and philosopher has an open, i.e. incomplete, thought, always open to the maius of God and truth, always developing, according to that law that St Vincent of Lérins describes in this way: ‘*Annis consolidetur, dilatetur tempore, sublimetur aetate*’”, “*Commonitorium primum*” 23, PL 50, 668 in FRANCESCO, *Veritatis gaudium*, (29/1/2018), n. 3.
3. Cf. UNESCO, *Investing in cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue*, Paris, UNESCO, 2009 [https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000184755].
4. “By their practice, charismatic gifts can generate affinities, proximity and spiritual kinship through which the charismatic heritage, starting from the person of the founder, is shared and deepened, giving rise to true spiritual families. Ecclesial aggregations, in their various forms, present themselves as shared charismatic gifts. Ecclesial movements and new communities show how a specific original charism can aggregate the faithful and help them to fully live their Christian vocation and their state of life in the service of the ecclesial mission”. Translated from the Italian original: G. MÜLLER, *Lettera Iuvenescit Ecclesia ai Vescovi della Chiesa cattolica sulla relazione tra doni gerarchici e carismatici per la vita e la missione della Chiesa*, (15/5/2016), n. 16. “The character of a ‘movement’ distinguishes them in the ecclesial panorama as strongly dynamic realities, capable of generating a particular interest in the Gospel and proposing an idea of Christian life, that would involve every aspect of human existence. The aggregation of the faithful and an intense sharing of existence, in the pursuit of an increased life of faith, hope and charity, well expresses the ecclesial dynamic as mystery of communion for the mission and manifests itself as a sign of the unity of the Church in Christ. In this sense, these ecclesial aggregations, arising from a shared charism, tend to have as their purpose ‘the general apostolic purpose of the Church’”, translated from the Italian original: *ibid.*, n. 2.
5. Approved in 1962 under the official name Work of Mary, it has spread to over 180 countries with over 2 million adherents. The message it wants to bring to the world is that of unity. The goal is therefore to cooperate in building a more united world, driven by Jesus’ prayer to the Father “that they may all be one” (Jn 17:21), while respecting and valuing diversity. And to achieve this goal, dialogue is favoured, in the constant effort to build bridges and relationships of brotherhood between individuals, peoples and cultural spheres. Cf. https://www.focolare.org/chisiamo/; https://archive.is/jgbE7.
6. J. DELORS, *Learning: the Treasure within; Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century*, 1996, 81.
7. “The Istituto Universitario Sophia (IUS) [Sophia University Institute] is an expression of the Work of Mary (Focolare Movement), born in 1943 thanks to the impulse of Chiara Lubich (1920-2008) and now present throughout the world thanks to the adhesion of people of all ages, social strata, cultures, states of life and professions. The vast and consolidated current of life and thought animated by the Work of Mary draws on the ‘charism of unity’, an original illustration and incarnation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the history of our time. This charism has shown itself to be

singularly effective, from the very beginning and over the years, in its integral and unified promotion of the person in his constitutive relationship with God, with his brothers and sisters, and with nature. Hence, in particular, the commitment to build bridges of encounter and places of communion between persons, peoples and cultures in the perspective of the unity invoked by Jesus in the prayer addressed to the Father in the imminence of his passion, and towards which, he himself became the universal path of realisation through the abysmal stripping endured in the abandonment on the cross". P. CODA, *The 'Sophia' University Institute: Project and Programme*, "Sophia. Research on the Foundations and Correlation of Knowledge" 1 (2008) 2.

8. Translated from the Italian original: H. GARDNER, *Formae mentis. Saggio sulla pluralità dell'intelligenza* [Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences], Feltrinelli, Milano 1987, 132.
9. "According to Plato and Aristotle, 'astonishment' (thaûma, in Greek) is – famously – the attitude from which philosophy is born: that is, all knowledge and any decision that risks taking on a new beginning in terms of the experience and interpretation of Truth and the transformation of historical reality in the light of that Truth", translated from the Italian original: P. CODA, *Chiara Lubich: Discorso inaugurale di Sophia. Analisi e interpretazione, "Sophia Ricerche sui fondamenti e la correlazione dei saperi"* 2 (2013) 187.
10. A. KANANIRA, *Political Communication in Enhancing East African Collective Identity: Promotion of Swahili in Burundi and Uganda as Case Study*, Sophia University Institute, Loppiano (FI) 2021. As UNESCO points out: "There has been a tendency to equate cultural diversity with the diversity of national cultures. Yet national identity is to some extent a construction, grounded in a sometimes reconstructed past and providing a focus for our sense of commonality. Cultural identity is a more fluid, self-transforming process, to be seen less in terms of a past inheritance than of a future project. In a globalizing world, cultural identities often derive from multiple sources; the increasing plasticity of cultural identities reflects the growing complexity of the globalized flows of people, goods and information" (UNESCO, *Investing in Cultural Diversity*, 9).
11. Translated from the Italian original: G.M. ZANGHÌ, *Identità e dialogo*, "Nuova Umanità" 4-5 (1979) 13.
12. Cf. M. CASTELLS, *Il potere dell'identità*, trad. it. di G. PANNOFINO, Università Bocconi Editore – EGEA, Milano 2014.
13. Translated from the Italian original: A.C. MONTOYA, *In-Comunicazione. Una prospettiva generativa e relazionale*, Città Nuova, Roma 2021, 156.
14. Translated from the Italian original: P. DONATI, *Oltre il multiculturalismo. La ragione relazionale per un mondo comune*, Laterza, Lecce 2008, 134.
15. Cf. C. LUBICH, *Inaugural speech at the Sophia summer school "Per una cultura dell'unità"*, "Sophia. Ricerche sui fondamenti e la correlazione dei saperi" 1 (2008) 18.
16. C. LUBICH, *The Spirituality of Unity and Trinitarian Life*. Conferral of an Honorary Doctorate in Theology to Chiara by the University of Trnava in Slovakia, 23/6/2003.
17. "The Institute's formation project envisages, as a priority, that study and daily life should meet and blend harmoniously together, so that one can access both scientifically educated knowledge (but made sapiential by being grafted into life nourished by the Gospel) and the intensity of wisdom (but developed by scientific research in the various articulations of knowledge). The intent being to overcome the risk of an education that is not also – and first and foremost – integral formation of the person. This is why the cycle of studies is inseparably divided into founding moments of life experiences in the light of the charism of unity and into lessons that are both theoretical and practical. The two moments refer to each other reciprocally: the lessons arise from the spaces opened up by the life experience of unity and this acquires its strength as a cultural proposal in the moment, theoretical and practical, proposed in the lessons", *ibid.*, 8.
18. Analysing Lubich's inaugural address, Coda emphasises: "You will therefore find yourselves to be, as Jesus wishes, equal among all, brothers. This is the Trinitarian relationship that is established, through mutual love, between teachers and students. It is not a uniform, undifferentiated equality: precisely because it is a 'Trinitarian' relationship, like that which exists between the Father and the Son in the Holy Trinity. "The teachers", Chiara explains, "will be like the Father and you like the Son. You will therefore have to let yourselves be 'generated' by them, but you will also have to respond with your love", P. CODA, *Chiara Lubich*, 200.

19. From the words of Pope Francis at the audience with the IUS: "For us Christians, Wisdom is Jesus crucified and risen, but his light illuminates all men (cf. Jn 1:9): all religions, all cultures, all authentic exercises of humanity". Address of the Holy Father Francis to the academic community of the "Sophia" University Institute of Loppiano, (14/11/2019), (https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2019/november/documents/papa-francesco_20191114_loppiano-univ-sophia.html; <https://archive.is/YQaje>).
20. The intercultural training processes at the IUS have a crucial agent, created specifically for the construction of an intercultural academic community, Community Life. It is a working group with its own office which is always open and at the service of the students, and which accompanies their training process in an integrative manner, taking particular account of the aspect of living the experience that each person has in his or her own residence while sharing time and space with people from different nations; but not only that, it also generates scenarios and spaces for interaction, offering the entire academic community moments of mutual understanding.
21. H. ALSAKKAF, *Esperienza a Sophia*, (9/11/2021).
22. "Thus the development of intercultural competencies should not be limited to the classroom but must extend to the 'university of life'" (UNESCO, *Investing in Cultural Diversity*, 17).
23. "In order to acquire a certain intercultural cognitive competence, it is necessary to put meta-communicative processes into practice. It is necessary to metacommunicate. That is, to be able to explain what we mean when we say something. In intercultural communication, pre-suppositions or assumptions have to be explained. This leads to a communication that is certainly less agile. However, in any case, a stricter control over the interpretation of others is indispensable. We should not take for granted that our interlocutor will interpret our message in accordance with the meaning we give it", translated from the Spanish original M. ALSINA, *Comunicación intercultural*, Anthropos, Barcelona 1999, 239.
24. Translated from the Spanish original: A. PORTERA – M. MILANI (eds.), *Competenze interculturali e successo formativo. Sviluppo di un modello nel contesto universitario*, Edizioni ETS, Bologna 2019, 132.
25. Cf. M. MARIANELLI, *Il luogo dell'Entre: una via per ripensare la modernità*, in Id. (ed), "Entre". *La relazione oltre il dualismo metafisico*, Città Nuova, Roma, 2020, VI.
26. Cf. M.C. NUSSBAUM, *Los límites del patriotismo*, Paidós, Barcelona 1996.
27. COUNCIL OF EUROPE, *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. Living Together with Equal Dignity*, 2 May 2008.
28. Translated from the Italian original: "It is interesting to note that by resolutely indicating Wisdom as the aim and main object of the school, Chiara in fact enacts a sort of peaceful revolution that brings the university back to its original inspiration [...]. It is a change of axis and intention, which questions the commitment of the professors and that of the students at the root. First one must teach and learn Wisdom, then the various disciplines: or rather, the two must go hand in hand, and never one without the other. One studies, yes, the various disciplines, but the horizon, the source and the ultimate goal of everything must be Wisdom" (P. CODA, *Chiara Lubich* 192).
29. Translated from the Italian original: L. CERVIÑO, *Vangelo, pluralismo e dialogo interculturale*, "Nuova Umanità".
30. A. SIMON, Intervento in occasione della visita della Vice Gran Cancelliere presso lo IUS, Loppiano, novembre 2021.
31. Cf. A.C. MONTOYA, *Comunicazione ed enigma della relazione*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2019, 1.
32. Translated from the Italian original: CERVIÑO, *Vangelo, pluralismo e dialogo interculturale*, 69.
33. FRANCESCO, Esortazione Apostolica, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Città del Vaticano 24/11/2013, n. 272.
34. GARDNER, *Formae*, 132.



Intercultural Education in Chile

A Critical Approach from Intercultural Philosophy*

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Abstract

This text will address the importance of interculturality within the social and political context of Chile, and then expand to demonstrate the challenges that arise in every place where cultural diversity is a daily fact. These challenges will be approached philosophically and then the text will venture a definition of intercultural philosophy that critically considers current relationships involving spaces of recognition of cultures in those territories where native peoples (as in Africa or America) have been made invisible or where the spread of migration in recent decades necessitates relationships that are far from being truly human. From here, interculturality will be presented as an object of philosophy followed by the presentation of some key ideas for critically advancing towards spaces where we are ready to recognize ourselves.

Keywords

Intercultural education – Intercultural philosophy – Chilean education – Object of philosophy – Recognition.

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* Translated from the original Spanish by Kathryn Baecht

*There is a crack that greets and illuminates us,
let us move forward through it, let us discover the wound,
let us navigate its sores, let us find new paths
between the scars toward the sea.*

Elisa Loncón, 2021¹

1

The context of this paper

On October 25, 2020, a national plebiscite was held in Chile to determine if the citizens were in favor of beginning a constituent process to draft a new Constitution for the country. The plebiscite was preceded by approximately one hundred protests throughout the entire national territory the year before; protests that indicated the urgency to incorporate social rights into the Constitution – rights such as health, education, decent housing, a pension system, and the right to water, among others. These came amid demands also for recognition and the necessity for a change of direction in relationships between humans and with the ecosystem; specifically the recognition of indigenous peoples and along with that recognition, not simply a mention in the constitution, already present in other Latin American Constitutions without a decisive result², but the demand for the incorporation of seats representative all of the surviving indigenous peoples into the general drafting process of the fundamental charter. This implies their presence in the discussion of the political regime, the form of state, the justice system, constitutional principles, the economic model, and environmental or fundamental rights, among others, thereby including diverse visions and cultural practices in a form unprecedented in the country, as it would be that: 1) this discussion or dialogue be made with (or between) the different peoples, and 2) this discussion would form part of each of the axes that would support coexistence in the country. In effect, this grand table of 155 people elected to draft the new Constitution, known as the Constitutional Convention, was not only comprised of those who are recognized as Chilean, but also by representatives of the Mapuche, Aymara, Rapa Nui, Quechua, Lican Antay, Diaguita, Colla, Kawashkar, Chango and Yagán, indigenous peoples of the territory that today we call Chile.

Why begin with this small narration (conjunctural) within the framework of this paper? Because this is understood; it makes sense within the course of a series of dialogues that we have carried out in congresses, classes, studies, and writings that have tried to reveal in a critical way the paradoxes of Chilean reality, trying to make visible the importance of interculturality and recognition within the framework of the historical demands of the peoples themselves. In response to these demands, intercultural education has acted as a key space in recent decades, and we have to recognize that progress has been made on that long road, but in the scenario in which we find ourselves today, it is encouraging to be able to review and possibly reformulate the ideas that have unilaterally given rise to alternatives and regulations, opening the possibility of redistribution of power and access to a just system that ensures the dignity of life.

There is no doubt that coexistence and dialogue are some of the challenges that we have in the world today; Chile has not been the exception. Since the nineties, the idea of multiculturalism and interculturality has been taken up by diverse governments in order to implement policies that contribute to the bridging of cultures; the reasons for this timeline have long been recorded: of key importance was the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of what has tended to be called and taught as the “Discovery of America”, which bore demands of resistance from the original peoples; on the other hand, the increase of migration, with its geopolitical justifications and, similarly, the expansion of a neoliberal-globalization project on a global scale. In Chile, the nineties were also inaugurated with the restoration of democracy after 17 years of

military dictatorship; and in that process of hope – as presidential candidates were put forth (among whom would be the first president elected) – certain agreements were committed to with indigenous organizations that aligned with the recently enacted ILO Convention No. 169 concerning indigenous and tribal peoples through the New Imperial Agreement. These commitments (an elaboration of a legal framework for the development of indigenous peoples, constitutional recognition, and ratification of the aforementioned Convention No. 169) concentrated for a long time on the enactment of a single indigenous law that created the National Corporation for Indigenous Development (known as CONADI in Spanish), which remains in force to this day and whose mission has tried to promote, coordinate, and execute the law of the state in favor of the integral development of indigenous peoples and communities. The Convention No. 169 was ratified almost twenty years later (in 2008) and yet still has not achieved constitutional recognition. Since 2008 a series of measures have been implemented with the purpose of compensating the historical debt to those peoples, but also promoting recognition; but these promises, written in the opening pages of various government ministries, have done nothing more than discursively undertake a series of challenges without truly incorporating the different communities in the decisions that involve them. From there, even though talk of multiculturalism or even interculturalism has come into fashion³, there has been no real and necessary advance of intercultural recognition.

2

On interculturality as an object of philosophy

In the nineties, intercultural philosophy began to be spoken of in earnest, this appeared, as Raúl Fornet-Betancourt wrote in 1994, as “the historical alternative to undertaking the transformation of existing ways of thinking”⁴; that is to say, as he would write a year later, to invite us to assume the challenges of the times, moving from a thought that thinks and rethinks its tradition towards a thought that, knowing that there is not thought without tradition, invites one to make “their” tradition. On the other hand, it was a philosophy open to dialogue between cultures that critically examines the question of why it thinks as it thinks in order to make explicit the monocultural bias of its main concepts⁵. Among the meetings that emerged this decade, we find the International Congress of Intercultural Philosophy whose first event was held in Mexico City between March 6 and 10, 1995. Raimon Panikkar opened the event. In his lecture he presented interculturality as “the philosophical imperative of our time”⁶ because it had already become a fashionable concept and necessary to defend as a critical space, but also because he understood it as that which makes of philosophy a place of questioning about questions, that allows the perennial problematization of life and the world, forcing the movement of concepts and philosophy itself away from a simple experiment – how it is to approach ourselves, look at ourselves, and listen to ourselves and towards – towards themselves. Days later, another speaker, Josef Estermann, defined intercultural philosophy as an ongoing fact, as an experience lived voluntarily and of necessity in many parts of the world through migration⁷. Next, Dina Picotti demonstrated that interculturality gave philosophy a necessary challenge. This was demonstrated at the referred to meeting from the experience of abandonment and marginalization experienced in the American continent, but also in those situations common to any country that lives the negativity of different logics and ways of thinking arising from different languages and ways of knowing, of organization, of economics, and also of ethical sense and spirituality⁸.

As can be seen, the first congress of intercultural philosophy was inaugurated with the assimilation of a purpose from the movement, the experience, the questions, and actions that describe interculturality as a process open to diversity and novelty. The work of reflection that was inaugurated there has continued to be carried out in meet-

ings held every two years for total of 13, and even though there are new faces and themes, the objectives remain current. We know that it is not easy to move these ideas into government policies, for example into educational policies, because it is a critical gamble to understand that what may seem the best and most secure is possibly not, or isn't for everyone; from there, as the Chilean philosopher José Santos, "interculturality is always a risk, a bet: there is no insurance nor previous measures that guarantee a result"⁹.

In a 1981 text entitled, "The Object of Philosophy" Ignacio Ellacuría, a Basque-Salvadorean who was murdered in 1989, wrote that, "in difference to other ways of knowing, philosophy, in particular, is characterized by having an initial vagueness"¹⁰. Indeed, philosophy – we are told – in difference to the sciences for example, does not desire to identify an object in order to possess it, for in that act it becomes a "latent and fugitive" object, ephemeral and – rescued from a text by Zubiri in 1933 – "a useless passion"¹¹. No, even if we were to realize at the end of a journey that we have still not finished, and therefore that finishing is not possible, "your own failure would in reality say much more than what other successes claim to say"¹². Seen this way, to refer to the object of philosophy will be to refer to all of that which is *happening* in historical reality¹³ and that practicing, which is a *gerund*, permits us to open ourselves to the possibility of the other. It is, it seems, fitting to accept the vagueness, the difficult work in a culture accustomed to domination. But the acceptance of the fugitive invites us to a passionate labor that not only contrasts concepts and theories, but also experiences and biographies, calls to criticism and creation; a criticism no longer purely academic but involved in reality. Because this, the place of enunciation – as it has been called by various Latin American philosophers – has become of radical importance, therefore there is no reality without context, there is no reality without history and without roots, that is, without, "a way of life from which one thinks"¹⁴.

This was also stated on several occasions by the Chilean philosopher Humberto Giannini because for him philosophy could not be far from all the things that make the subject-philosopher what he is; that is: without everyday praxis¹⁵. For his part, the Argentinian Arturo Andrés Roig employed the term "a priori anthropological"¹⁶ precisely to show that before all thought there is a cultural subject living the contingencies, their contexts; and that is precisely what makes it valuable¹⁷.

However, to present interculturality as an aim of philosophy is to recognize diverse places, contexts, and subjects with the challenge of being able to access mutual recognition. In 2015, the German publishing house that has also published the minutes of the aforementioned congresses, published a book that commemorated and gave an account in an "institutionalized" way of the thirty years of work of intercultural philosophy (the institutional is emphasized since, as pointed out in that text, the experience of intercultural philosophy can be traced back to the beginnings of philosophy itself). Said book, entitled *Zur Geschichte und Entwicklung der interkulturellen Philosophie (History and Development of Intercultural Philosophy)*, was written between various and diverse representatives of intercultural philosophy, which – as indicated by the Argentinian philosopher Alcira Bonilla – demonstrated the breadth of the movement and the will to "find historical antecedents for this way of understanding philosophy, to give an account of the languages in which that philosophy is written, of its canon (the authors to whom they turn), of its problems, and of its necessary link with the historical-cultural context"¹⁸. These texts showed a certain intention of intercultural philosophy or of those who have dedicated themselves to it as an issue of great relevance, but avoided the temptation to assume it to be the fashion that Raimon Panikkar warned of at the beginning of the International Congresses, and that Bonilla also highlights; we refer to the temptation to use the term and the efforts of so many as a sign of activity functional¹⁹ for globalization and / or the difficult encounters between "some" and "others". In effect, it is a question of assuming the philosophical difficulty posed by the question of recognition and the encounter "be-

tween” traditions, which would provoke by the act various responses and positions. This dislocation, which we would call, “historical reality” in Ellacuría, is nothing but an open historical reality – *the height* of plural realities, diverse and different; just as, following Ram Adhar Mall, the values of this intercultural philosophy²⁰ are values that allow us to no longer speak of a universal philosophy, but, we believe, of the characteristics of a praxis that makes possible the “universality of horizons”, since – as Bonilla explains – we would no longer say, “‘this is universal’ but ‘this is universal for us’ and from there we launch ourselves into a dialogue”²¹, a dialogue of traditions.

Moreover, how to move towards the relation between traditions, from places of enunciation, of everyday life, without passing over the other, without imposing codes or rules in order to start relations? In these meetings, various alternatives have been given. The Chilean José Santo raised it in the following way in *From Latin American to African philosophy: Clues for an Intercultural Philosophical Dialogue*: “If a dialogue requires a prior regulation that makes it possible, where does it come from? Which of the future participants proposes it or imposes it?”²². And it is not easy to start a relationship without rules because to make those rules an agreement that was previously agreed to is needed, and so forth it goes backwards... or forwards; the problem would be settled by someone who decides, but if that is precisely what is at stake, the solution would be an example of the problem in question. The aporia described and debated in several of these congresses of interculturality ceases to be a problem if we stop presenting it as a logical-scientific one and we see it from the point of view of the experience that it provides historical reality and nothing more, since, in effect, intercultural dialogue about the object of philosophy, as described by Ellacuría, maintains its initial vagueness, and in this case, following Panikkar, we cannot know a priori if we are going to understand each other, but from the experience of having understood each other²³, one must say, along with Santos that, “intercultural dialogue presents as a space, a terrain of meeting and possible un-meeting, where the participants can arrive at understanding or not. Interculturality is always a risk, a gamble: there is no insurance nor previous measures that guarantee a result”²⁴.

The key to establishing dialogues and encounters that do function has been the will, the disposition to approach, to know each other and recognize each other. From there we can venture to say that this simple action that some call “disposition” is the motor of interculturality, and it is a motor of philosophy, in so much as it permits us to be attentive to historical reality, to the multiple and various forms of reality. As Victoria González Prada proposes, it is necessary to newly cultivate this disposition to learn and to think; that is to say, to begin by recognizing our intercultural illiteracy and return to school so to speak, in order to read the world and our own history through the different literacies the diversity of cultures offer us²⁵. Without that, philosophy will have to speak in the abstract for a subject that does not exist.

3

Intercultural Education in Chile

Since 2010, educational establishments in Chile have been obligated to incorporate into their curriculum a minimum of one course entitled Indigenous Language (designed for Aymara, Mapudungún, Quechua and Rapa Nui languages). This alternative is offered at those sites where more than 20% of students are of indigenous descent²⁶. In 2017, according to the Ministry of Education in Chile, out of the 9335 establishments that included these students in their classrooms²⁷, 1,500 offered this course. The four-hour weekly course is given by a traditional educator who is responsible for imparting cultural and linguistic knowledge to the students of the establishment. The idea is to center the course on the rehabilitation of the historic present through the use and comprehension of the words in their respective languages, not presenting – as was done for decades – the history of these peoples as identities

from the past but focusing on the current activities of the community. However, this instance presents at least three difficulties that I would like to highlight: in relation to place and context, on memory, and on immigration.

3.1 On place and context

The implementation of the aforementioned intentions cannot be achieved without feedback from the context that accompanies what the traditional educator does.

Although the willingness of some directors and families manages to encourage spaces with a commitment to interculturality, preparing appropriate sites for cultural ceremonies and other emblematic places for the imparting of tradition, as well as workshops and activities that are added to the official curriculum to reinforce the commitment to language and traditions, these are not enough to accompany the process since it depends completely on the will and availability of the communities, even more so when the national reality is not prepared to accompany them. This issue can be noted in the absence of an intercultural curriculum that encourages the general disposition of other school professionals, this due to the lack of adequate programs in the curricula of the country's pedagogical professions. For example, what from their respective subjects makes a math professor or professor of music or Castellano incorporate themselves into the intercultural dialogue in their school? Some schools inserted in the Mapuche communities, for example, allow the indigenous language course to be taught in a *ruka* (Mapuche house made with materials extracted directly from nature and usually in a circular shape) while other subjects are carried out in a "traditional" classroom that is usually built of concrete and square in shape. From this experience, a traditional Mapuche educator commented:

"The Mapuche has his *kimün*, 'knowledge', the other way around. The Mapuche does not have a square *kimün* like the corner of this house; it is not like that. The Mapuche has a round *kimün*, in the shape of a circle, so that is what we change here with *lamngen* María Isabel (mentor teacher). We must see if we can twist the hand, but not all at once, because we have to pass the plans and programs"²⁸.

How to activate plans and programs are not the only processes that need to be understood in the transmission of the objectives promulgated in these state programs on intercultural education in Chile, but also a series of processes of management of ethnic differences. Among these, certain issues that seem non-negotiable allude to the education that traditional educators have received. Thus, the latter are chosen by the educational community and the families from the recognition of the wisdom that members of the community possess about their own traditions; ideas that are difficult to insert in the System of Competencies incorporated in recent decades in the Chilean education system, as also has been done in the rest of the world. Hence, stories such as those exemplified by the following case study appear:

"The intercultural competencies of the traditional educator of the ELI (School with Indigenous Language) are different. She has been described by educational actors as a great expert in the Mapuche culture and language, facets that motivated her election for the position. However, the director indicated that to practice teaching she still lacks mastery over non-Mapuche educational elements predominant in the teaching logic of this school, which is why he has encouraged the educator to finish her secondary education and, in that way, will be able to link both types of knowledge"²⁹.

The need for educators to know the global system of education that is present in all schools, along with the methods and the global language, is evidence of an act of

insertion in a general system of teaching that the State of Chile has adopted from principally European contexts, accommodating the language of codes of teaching to the international requirements. On the other hand, those spaces demonstrate the need for translation of the traditional educator to the rest of the teaching staff, in such a way as to be considered and evaluated by the indicators established by the system. This action also happens in other Latin American spaces. On this, the author Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui comments:

“One time I told these “friends of the Indians” that they should no longer talk about the Indians, but with the Indians in their language, because the detail is in the linguistic asymmetry. If the one who has to translate to make their self understood is the indigenous person, then there is never really going to be a dialogue of equals. The Mestizo Creole should also be translated into Aymara or Quechua for the Indians, or a permanent simultaneous translation service should be available in public forums at least”³⁰.

3.2 The past and memory

In the opening speech of the chairperson of the Constitutional Convention in Chile, the Mapuche academic (elected to a reserved seat by the native peoples), Elisa Loncón, highlighted the history, memory, and collective biography that representatives of the native peoples, but also the rest of the constituents of the convention, with their own cracks and pains and dreams, carry to this important meeting. In this speech, she said:

“When the people of my pueblo show up, they speak of those who have departed, of our elders. This is what we call *kvpalme*. We also speak of the territories of origin the country of childhood, what we call *tuwvn*. In these last few days, I have been able to hear, dear constituents, the *kvpalme* and the *tuwvn* from each of you. How beautiful this palace sounds with all of our ancestors, with all of our territories, with all of our memories”³¹.

Loncón gave her speech in Mapuzungún, the Mapuche language. The first day, the representatives of the indigenous peoples defended speaking in their own languages; and so it was done, using translators that have even included sign language. It was important for her to make the past present, since there is no present in her culture without the traditions and the contexts that allow the emergence of words. The hope that is expected today in the drafting of the Constitution arises from the pain and wounds that illuminate dreams. “There is a crack that greets and illuminates us, let us move forward through it, let us discover the wound, let us navigate its sores, let us find new paths between the scars towards the sea”³².

Elisa Loncón continued her story by giving examples of the past to explain the present: children who until recently were punished until bleeding in their schools for speaking Mapuzungún, children who, when they grew up, took care of their children by inserting them into the official educational system for fear of being discriminated against. Hence, we need an intercultural education that can account for the debts of the past, of memory, in order to identify the realities that constitute what we call reality or the universe; and that rescues traditions in order to think and exist with these historic *presents* that make traditions.

We maintain, however, that an intercultural education cannot be focused on or directed to only those who seem diverse (different), but on the contrary, it must be directed towards the entire school system, public and private, because to the extent that we manage to unpin diversity from otherness, progress can be made in understanding that we are all diverse in multiple dimensions, and in this sense, to construct spaces of equality and recognition.

3.3 Immigrants

Intercultural schools must also tackle the challenge of immigration; however, the laws of Chilean education have not updated their measures for foreign children and adolescents (NNA in Spanish) and their recognition in the classroom. The challenge continues – after a decade of sustained waves of south-south immigration that has situated us among the countries with the largest growth of immigrants – to be whether these children can exercise the simple right to education. This situation occurs because they are poor children, and therefore, children who, although they can attend school, need their parents to carry out migration regularization so that they may have their level of advancement recognized and to promote them in their courses; without this it is impossible to access benefits. However, studies show that the main problems in these spaces are not these, but ones that pertain to the situation of discrimination which the students suffer daily from school professionals, from their friends or friends' families, based on the ascription of inferiority, such as the assignment of stereotypes and gender discrimination; ideas bound in the Chilean imagination, which has built racial categories in which being white-European has become a fundamental element for the symbolism of the nation and the distinction of classes and positions of power³³. “You are improving the race”, the current president of Chile said a few years ago to a dark-haired woman carrying a blonde child³⁴. About this, the sociologist María Emilia Tijoux indicates that: “Moralizing speech is socially correct, but it does not change habits, and therefore, does not touch the deeper structures in which are sheltered violence against foreigners that seem dangerous”³⁵.

4

On the dignity of life

What has been reported so far implies what Steffoni and Corvalán describe as the distance between theory and practice. There are studies that highlight models of schools, recognizing critical exclusionary, assimilationist, multicultural, or intercultural types³⁶, but even the latter, which attempts to confront the challenges with the principles of social justice and human dignity, is faced with the reality of the educational establishments without plans and concrete activities, nor policies of real recognition³⁷ that bet on the dignity of people. Most of the achievements depend on the willingness of the directors or teachers who find themselves involved in some of these projects.

Hence, intercultural philosophy continues to be an imperative of our time; this implies contradicting the ideas of what it is to be Chilean, of citizenship, of legality of nation, that generate exclusion and pain. As Raúl Fonet-Betancourt indicates, there is a need for an intercultural dialogue that affirms, “The pre-political fundamentalness of the dignity of the human being who has not been awarded a passport. Their ‘credential’ is their corporeal human reality³⁸,” and from there, from the anthropological gamble – he added – will arise the challenge of weaving new principles that gamble on an intercultural legal status. This is the challenge that the Constitutional Convention in Chile has today, although, we know it is a challenge not only presented in Chile. Intercultural Philosophy invites us to practice a contextual anthropology that takes care of reality, carrying it, that is to say, easing the burden of those who have it the hardest in leading the way on the path to being human; as Raúl Fonet-Betancourt says, through hospitality and coexistence, through affection and tenderness, and we may add, through condolences for having to travel without wanting to, for having to learn a language by force, and for praying to an unknown god. A critical approach by intercultural philosophy to the events that still afflict us as humanity today means moving from tolerance to “seeing in others a source to enrich one’s own world”, which is “a practice of welcome and justice at the same time”³⁹.



Endnotes

1. Translated from the Spanish original: E. LONCÓN, *Discurso de Apertura en la Convención Constitucional*, 2021. <https://radio.uchile.cl/2021/10/26/elisa-loncon-con-descentralizacion-y-autonomias-territoriales-caminar-hacia-la-profundizacion-de-la-democracia/>; <https://archive.is/KF61v>
2. Cf. L. ZUCHEL – H. SAMOUR, *Para una interculturalidad crítica. Reflexiones desde Raúl Fonet Betancourt e Ignacio Ellacuría*, “Hybris, Revista de Filosofía”, Numero Especial: *Debates contemporáneos sobre Justicia Social*, 9 (2018) I, 75-98.
3. I recommend the previously cited text, written together with the professor Héctor Samour of the Central American University UCA El Salvador, in which the emphasis on teaching the English language in order to participate in the international framework along with the constitutional recognition of the original peoples stands out as an intercultural measure of his country.
4. Translated from the Spanish original: R. FONET-BETANCOURT. *Crítica intercultural de la filosofía latinoamericana actual*, Trotta, Madrid 2004, 72.
5. Cf. ID., *Kulturen der Philosophie, Dokumentation des I. Internationalen Kongresses für interkulturelle Philosophie*, Verlag der Augustinus – Buchhandlung, Aachen 1996, 11-12.
6. Translated from the German original: *ibid.*, 28.
7. *Ibid.*, 120.
8. *Ivi.*
9. Translated from the Spanish original: J. SANTOS, *De la Filosofía latinoamericana a la africana. Pistas para un diálogo filosófico intercultural*, “Estudios avanzados” 13 (2010) 135.
10. Translated from the Spanish original: I. ELLACURÍA, *Filosofía de la Realidad Histórica*, Trotta y Fundación Zubiri, Madrid 1990, 17.
11. Translated from the Spanish original: ID., *La idea de filosofía de X. Zubiri, Escritos filosóficos II*, UCA editores, San Salvador 1999, 379.
12. *Ivi.*
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15. Cf. H. GIANINNI, *La reflexión cotidiana. Hacia una arqueología de la experiencia*, Editorial Universitaria, Santiago de Chile 1990.
16. Cf. A.A. ROIG, *Teoría y crítica del pensamiento latinoamericano*, Una ventana, Buenos Aires, 2009.
17. Cf. A. CONTARDI, *Las tramas del sujeto en la obra de Arturo Roig: a priori antropológico, condición humana y dignidad*, “Utopía y Praxis Latinoamericana” 23 (2018) 81.
18. Cf. A.B. BONILLA, *La filosofía intercultural como diálogo crítico necesario en el cambio de época. Desafíos epistemológicos y ético-políticos*, “Cuadernos del Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos” Vol. II, 3 (2017) 10.
19. Cf. F. TUBINO, *La interculturalidad crítica como proyecto ético-político*, “Encuentro continental de educadores agustinos”, Lima 2005. In: https://scholar.google.com.pe/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=es&user=xIPyDPMAAAAJ&alert_preview_top_rm=2&citation_for_view=xIPyDPMAAAAJ:j3f4tGmQtD8C; <https://archive.is/dJ9xi>.

20. Translated from the Spanish original: A.B. BONILLA, *La filosofía intercultural como diálogo crítico necesario en el cambio de época*, 13.
21. *Ivi.*
22. Translated from the Spanish original: J. SANTOS, *De la Filosofía latinoamericana a la africana. Pistas para un diálogo filosófico intercultural*, "Estudios avanzados" 13 (2010) 134.
23. Cf. R. PANIKKAR, *La interpretación intercultural*, in G. GONZÁLEZ (ed.), *El discurso Intercultural. Prolegómenos para una filosofía intercultural*, Biblioteca Nueva, Madrid 2002, 23-75.
24. Translated from the Spanish original: SANTOS, *De la Filosofía*, 135.
25. Cf. V. GONZÁLEZ DE PRADA, *Los derechos de los pueblos indígenas: hacia la construcción de un derecho intercultural. El plurijuridismo*, in M. GARROS – M. MARTÍNEZ (eds.), *Ambiente y pueblos indígenas. Una mirada interdisciplinaria*, Ediciones de la Universidad Católica, Salta 2017.
26. Esta obligatoriedad incorporada en el Decreto 280 del 2009 del Ministerio de Educación comienza el año 2013; hasta entonces se requería un 50% de estudiantes con ascendencia indígena.
27. 9335 representa el 79% del total de los establecimientos educacionales del país. Más información en: <https://peib.mineduc.cl/educacion-intercultural-bilingue/>; <https://archive.is/GvsYJ>.
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39. *Ibid.*, 18.



Formation Experiences in the Search for God and in Reciprocal Listening

Ideas for Theological Reflection in Support
of Pastoral Practices
in Intercultural Communities/Churches/Societies*

❖ Anne Zell



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Abstract

Starting from her own experience as a pastor and formator for the *Essere Chiesa Insieme* (Being Church Together) project of the Evangelical Churches of Italy, which welcomes migrant evangelical brothers and sisters, especially from various African countries, a case study is presented recounting the liberation of a Ghanaian widow that was experienced and celebrated within the community. The event evolved from the challenges and hopes for new approaches and the need for new skills, becoming a true intercultural workshop. In this short contribution some ideas for theological reflection are outlined, in support of updated pastoral practices in pluri-ethnic and pluri-cultural religious communities and churches. They can, however, also be applied in some way to multicultural congregations that wish to become intercultural. The challenge and effort involved in learning about these paths in itself holds the prophetic promise of healing and transformation. The LINFA intercultural seminars and the Master of Theology and Diakonia from an Intercultural Perspective, are introduced as examples of appropriate courses of study and as an endeavor of mutual formation, with an exchange of experiences and knowledge.

Keywords

Multicultural religious communities – Displacement – Awareness – Sharing – Mutual transformation – Prophecy

After graduating in Protestant Theology from the University of Heidelberg, **Anne (Annegret) Zell** was ordained as a pastor in 1993. In 1995, she moved from Germany to Italy and has since been registered as a Waldensian pastor with the Tavola Valdese. She has ministered in the Waldensian Valleys and in the Methodist Churches in Verbano, where she collaborated in setting up a home for immigrant families. She then became pastor of the Waldensian Evangelical Church in Milan, also involved in the Council of Christian Churches and the Forum of Religions. Finally, for more than 10 years she led the Waldensian Evangelical Church of Brescia, a multicultural community with a majority of believers from various African countries. For years she has been collaborating in the integration project "Essere Chiesa Insieme" of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy,

* Translated from the original Italian by Anne Theresa Whaley

promoting and accompanying intercultural training courses. In order to improve her own pastoral training and her ability to listen and mediate between different people, she achieved the first level of 'Clinical Pastoral Training', took part in a cultural exchange project between women ministers with a fellow pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Togo and a two-month internship in a church of the RCA (Reformed Church of America) in Holland, MI. She is currently pastor of the Evangelical Waldensian Church in Como, member of the advisory board for migration of the CCPE (Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe) and coordinator of the Master's in Theology and Diakonia from an intercultural perspective at the Valdese Faculty of Theology in Rome. She also regularly collaborates in the guidance of candidates for pastoral ministry and in the training of young intercultural mediators.

1

Introduction and contextualization

Here I would like to offer some ideas for theological reflection in support of pastoral practices (for people who provide a service or carry out a ministry) in intercultural communities, churches and congregations. I am not primarily a formator or instructor in intercultural training courses, but first and foremost an evangelical pastor. Although consecrated in one of Germany's large regional Protestant churches, I was then called to carry out my ministry in the Waldensian Evangelical Church in Italy, in various communities marked by issues related to minority groups and diaspora, but also striving to be a church, an intercultural community.

Beginning in the 1990s, in fact, the Waldensian and Methodist churches in the northeast, as well as in the large cities, have received the arrival of migrant evangelical brothers and sisters (mostly from Ghana and other African countries, but also from the Philippines or Latin-American countries) as both a challenge and a hope. Will "Being Church Together" be possible? In other words, will it be possible to provide more than just a place and a time for various groups and "their cult", and not live more or less undisturbed in separate compartments? Will we be able to celebrate together, in different languages and spiritual expressions, mutually accept, listen and dialogue with each other, in order to overcome misunderstandings and conflict?

In a certain sense, our churches have become a sort of laboratory, so to speak, or intercultural construction site¹; a junction of the faithful with different stories and sensibilities, but also with prejudices, shadows, and wounds. Yearning for a sense of belonging, they also need to safeguard their own roots. This is a context, as Davide Zolletto explains, "of high sociocultural complexity"².

It is from the context of this ambitious but also complex project and process (considered a worthy undertaking by the Protestant sister churches in Europe, which are inspired by the Italian experience) of "Being Church Together" that the need arises to create specific training courses. We must seek new paths of theological study and explore other approaches to pastoral care – but this is not all.

2

A break and attempts to repair it (a case study)

In his article *Interkulturelle Theologie*³, Volker Küster, professor of Comparative Religion and Missiology at the University of Mainz, describes a radical epistemological break between contextual theologies and Western academic theology. He also refers to the official declaration of the first conference of EATWOT, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, which was held in 1976.

This "break", this crisis that forces us to look at things differently, is something I understood by experiencing it myself first hand and finding myself ill-equipped and inadequate as a pastor to answer the cry for help from one of the members of our

church, who is originally from Ghana. I would like to begin here, from the context of my ministry experience, from this moment of both crisis and awareness. By telling the story of my encounter with Rose (her name has been changed), I will be able to sketch out some paths of reflection to investigate, often in question form, on the necessity for intercultural theological and pastoral training.

The case study: Rose, newly widowed, asks me, her pastor, for a prayer session for liberation and healing. "I need deliverance and healing, pastor, come to my house, pray with me, or my husband will keep haunting me".

Her request bewilders me.

What is the context? Even though I am not in Ghana, but in a big city in Lombardy, in a Waldensian church, I am invited – not to say obliged – by Rose's request to go there, to travel elsewhere, to her, to her world, feeling her wounds and fears and understanding her need for healing and hope for liberation. Shifting or allowing yourself to be shaken off base is necessary, as the British theologian Michael N. Jagessar stresses using the expression, "displaced God talk"⁴; to speak of God from other places. Equally essential, however, is the respect for boundaries/limits that cannot be crossed: Belonging, not melting. The need to belong and participate should not involve the risk of (con)fusion, losing your identity.

I understand in part.

– *What is the request and at the same time, what is expected of me, the pastor?* The woman attributes an authority to me that I struggle to recognize in myself: Taming spirits, proclaiming healing? (The authority is really from the Word, of which I am minister). Beginning with the awareness of the bias of my point of view due to my Western theological education, for example, towards a certain biblical interpretation, etc., I recognize the need for mediation and teamwork. In this particular case I needed assistance, and I was supported, without being divested of my role, by a Ghanaian colleague, the Presbyterian pastor Elymas Newell, who was familiar with haunting and healing⁵. The key words here are reciprocity and complementarity.

Becoming aware of needing resources, of other charismas.

I start from what we have in common.

– I feel then that we need to start from the vulnerability, the wounds, the sense of feeling lost and from the need to heal, to be liberated, for new possibilities of life. The pandemic has forced us to recognize our fragility and precariousness. At the same time, however, it has also revealed and accentuated inequality and injustice; for example, with respect to access to vaccines and health care in general. Of course, traumas and wounds, both individual and of the entire community, are different. They are narrated – or silenced – differently. Nevertheless, with Amélie Adamavi-Aho Ekué, a Togolese theologian, I am certain that from there, from the wounds, we must begin anew towards an intercultural and contextual theology⁶. We must try to embrace and connect the diverse texts/narrations/cultures and admit that we know the truth only in part and need another viewpoint, another story, while respecting and supporting differences and even disagreement. This agreeing to disagree, or rather, the agreement on the possibility of having different and conflicting opinions while still maintaining fellowship, can be of help especially when facing thorny ethical questions.

Agreement on the possibility of having different and conflicting opinions while remaining in communion with one another.

3

Some open questions (and no conclusion)

- *Developing intercultural aptitude is therefore necessary. But how?* The experiences of the LINFA⁷ intercultural training seminars from the FCEI (Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy) and the Master of Theology and Diakonia from an Intercultural Perspective at the Waldensian Faculty of Theology⁸, are endeavors of reciprocal formation, grassroots, with the exchange of experience and knowledge. It is not a course “for” faith leaders, or religious leaders from other cultures to facilitate integration, but a course of study “with”, valuing all resources. Recognizing a) the limits of one’s own knowledge/education as well as b) the resources of other people, makes the boundaries between instructors and students fluid; it invites dialogue, reciprocity and mediation and it requires teams who complement one another. These are just some of the possible paths and endeavors⁹.
- *Is the idea and the project of intercultural theological training for everyone? Or is it essentially ours (Western theologians); our need and attempt to remedy, recover and repair?* This uncomfortable question also applies to the “Being Church Together” project of the Evangelical Churches of Italy mentioned above. For example, Lutherans have founded “ethnic” churches of German language and culture in Italy. On the other hand, we expect our Ghanaian brothers and sisters to be open to inter-culturalism, while perhaps they need to pray and sing in Twi, to cultivate their own language and preserve their roots. The discussion remains open.
- *Many universities have created “intercultural theology programs”* (which were sometimes former institutes or programs of Missiology or something similar) and institutions for intercultural training. But I ask: shouldn’t we aim instead to permeate and reform all theological thought and teaching, in a radical change of setting? As a result, shouldn’t we endeavor to transform the very structure of our churches, which have fallen behind on issues concerning the imbalance of power and areas for participation?

4

On the horizon

Even while aiming towards the most intercultural theology possible and having welcoming pastoral practices, without borders, which seek to reconcile, heal and instill empowerment...we will not be the ones to put all the broken pieces back together again and heal the wounds. They will remain painfully visible.

The horizon, which transcends our limits and which expands beyond borders, is not ours, but God’s and of His promise of healing and salvation, of life in abundance, of walls torn down and enmities reconciled. At times, though, surprisingly and by pure grace, this horizon opens up in the midst of our labors, defeats and doubts in the here and now and it transforms us; as with Rose, or thanks to Rose and her hope for deliverance.

For this reason, in conclusion, I would like to return to her story. In the end, we prayed at her house in various languages (again, together with the Ghanaian pastor Newell). We taped the words, “I’m washed with Jesus’ blood”, on her front door as a confession of faith and assurance of protection. Then during Sunday worship in the Waldensian church, together with the whole community, when the promise of liberation (from the past and from the bonds of her husband: “He’s gone, he’s not here...”) and a new life (symbolized by the gift of new, very colorful clothing) was publicly proclaimed, the horizon opened. Other women, and not only the Ghanaians, laughed and cried, receiving (this is what they said), deliverance, closure, and a promise of a new beginning, new paths, and new horizons for their own stories of separations and complicated relationships. The power of the word “liberation”¹⁰, announced within a rite that was rich in cultural significance but translated and made understandable,

was able to cross boundaries and allowed others to experience empowerment and transformation as well.

Doing theology in an intercultural way involves harder work¹¹. Being a pastor in an intercultural context is challenging; it requires humility, self-criticism and the courage for trial and error even before specific training concepts. However, it carries with it the prophetic promise of transformation, of healing and of deliverance¹².

The LINFA Project (*Laboratorio Interculturale di Formazione e Accoglienza*) Intercultural training workshop

LINFA is a program that supports intercultural growth in communities opening themselves up to new arrivals and encourages the process of hospitality, cultural exchange and integration. It aims to build the unity of the Church despite linguistic and cultural barriers. LINFA was created by the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy (FCEI) to face a historical fact: One third of Italian evangelism is made up of immigrants.

Promoted by the commission, “Studies, Dialogue, and Integration – Being Church Together” of the FCEI and in collaboration with the Baptist Evangelical Christian Union of Italy, the Waldensian and Methodist Churches, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Waldensian Faculty of Theology, the Pentecostal Faculty of Religious Sciences, and the Evangelical Youth Federation of Italy (FGEI), LINFA is open to all active members of the participating evangelical churches, whether Italian or foreign. It offers a hybrid course of study, including intercultural exegeses, comparative ecclesiology, the history and development of missions, conflict mediation, group dynamics and techniques of cultural outreach. The methodology of the workshop – whose activities will be conducted in Italian – is cooperative learning, a method which favors shared reflection and study, woven into working in the local communities.

<https://www.fcei.it/linfa/>; <https://archive.is/xyIKt>

Theology and Diakonia from an Intercultural Perspective – Master’s degree (level 1)

Migratory movements and globalization have brought people who were once far away near, with their own expressions of faith and spirituality and with their own version of Christianity. In this course, the “overseas” mission and ecumenism are revisited with the paradigm of an “intercultural theology”, which aims to theologically examine new issues that have emerged from the meeting of diverse cultures, religions, theologies and spiritualities, paying special attention to developments in how diakonia in the church is understood.

The Master’s program is organized in ten intensive sessions spread over two years. Each session includes alternation between lectures by various specialists (theologians, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and legal experts); meetings with workers in intercultural environments and institutions; and conversations with people sharing their personal stories.

Some of the topics covered in the course are:

- Intercultural theology: The emergence of a new discipline, the context, the field of research, the course of study.



- The religious factor in migratory processes and integration.
- The Christian Mission and the meeting of cultures; inter-religious dialogue.
- Biblical and intercultural hermeneutics; postcolonial hermeneutics.
- New spiritual needs.
- The dialogue between cultures in intergenerational relationships.
- An introduction to Africa, Latin America and Asia; their cultures and traditional religions.

The Master's course is for anyone, foreign or Italian, pastor or social worker, who intends to work or already has a position of responsibility in a multicultural community or service center.

<http://facoltavaldese.org/it/master>; <https://archive.is/fmvdB>.

Endnotes

1. For further study on this aspect see the research by P. NASO – A. PASSARELLI, *I giovani evangelici e l'immigrazione: una generazione interculturale*, Carocci, Roma 2018.
2. See the contribution by Davide Zoletto in this volume (D. ZOLETTO, *Training in Pedagogical Research in Contexts of High Socio-Cultural Complexity*, in E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education in Multiculturality, Education to Interculturality In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy*, Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2023, 333-341) and D. ZOLETTO, *Bibbia e Intercultura*, Claudiana, Torino 2011, 11-24.
3. Cf. V. KÜSTER, *Interkulturelle Theologie*, in P. SCHREINER – U. SIEG – V. ELSENBAST (eds.), *Handbuch interreligiöses Lernen*, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh 2005, 179-191.
4. M.N. JAGESSAR, *Dis-place Theologising. Fragments of Intercultural God-Talk*, from the introduction to the Master in Intercultural Theology at the Waldensian Faculty of Theology, spoken on 31/01/2020.
5. For previous discussion on this theme, see W.J. HOLLENWEGER, *Erfahrungen der Leibhaftigkeit, Interkulturelle Theologie 1*, Kaiser, München 1979, 22-24.
6. Cf. A.A. EKUÈ, *Verso una teologia interculturale: implicazioni culturali, teologiche, etiche e pastorali per l'unità della chiesa*, "Protestantesimo" 74 (2019) 3-4, 187-196.
7. Cf. <https://www.fcei.it/linfa/>; <https://archive.is/xylKt>.
8. Cf. the LINFA and Master's degree projects respectively, on the websites of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy at www.fcei.it [<https://archive.is/Ld6py>] and the Waldensian Faculty of Theology at <http://facoltavaldese.org>; <https://archive.is/mHLic>.
9. See also C. LANOIR, *Quale didattica per una formazione teologica interculturale?*, "Protestantesimo" 66 (2011) 4, 373-381.
10. Cf. M.A. ODUYOYE, *African Women's Theology*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 2001, 22-38.
11. See the chapter, *Leitsätze zur interkulturellen Theologie*, in W.J. HOLLENWEGER, *Erfahrungen der Leibhaftigkeit*, 51.
12. Cf. ODUYOYE, *African Women's Theology*, 122.

Part Four

FURTHER INSIGHTS



Critical Intercultural Education between Similarities and Differences

Points of no Return, Choices and Strategies for Teaching Intercultural Competences*

❖ Milena Santerini



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Abstract

This article aims to identify the fundamental points of the relations between cultures in the face of super-diversity, with the goal of promoting and strengthening the perspective of real dialogue and intercultural exchange within a complex society. Moreover, starting from models of intercultural competence, it will analyze how to cultivate and encourage the intercultural competences of educators, especially those responsible for teaching the young generations, in a context of profound social and ecclesial changes.

Keywords

Diversity – Connection – Education – Formation – Intercultural competence

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* Translated from the original Italian by Anne Theresa Whaley

1

Points of no return

In order to promote and strengthen a perspective of real intercultural dialogue and exchange in a complex and troubled society like ours, it is useful to identify the points of “no return”, or better yet, the fundamental points of relations between cultures amid diversity. This need raises another question: How can the intercultural competences of educators, especially those who teach the young generations, be cultivated and encouraged? In fact, we have the need and responsibility to give a name and scientific structure to phenomena concerning cultural pluralism and above all of directing reflection towards the ideal of universal brotherhood, which is fraught with difficulties and adversity, but is not impossible¹. The point of reference for this vision is the Encyclical *Fratelli tutti* (All Brothers) by Pope Francis².

The need for authentic intercultural relations originates from the reality in which we are immersed: A global, mixed, plural world, where different ways of living, thinking, believing, eating and dressing are all intertwined³. This “mixed” cultural and social reality is currently magnified by travel and hyper-connectivity, but it has always existed throughout history. Today, the deep desire for unity, present in all human beings, is countered by a “separation mindset” that tends to divide rather than connect⁴. The tendency to differentiate has always been present in human groups and in the world of knowledge; consider for example, the difference between science and myth or between history and memory. However, a vision of the future is emerging where, without false fusions, it is increasingly clear these diversities must meet and dialogue with each other. This relates to Edgar Morin’s idea regarding the connectedness of the branches of knowledge or to the discoveries of the neurosciences that demonstrate Descartes’ error of separating mind and body, which in reality are inextricably connected⁵.

In the culture-world, society is fragmented into many islands and individuals, living in separate contexts, so that each instance of unity when it occurs, such as a religious one, seems weak. A person’s identity appears less defined, ever changing, in contrast to the rigid roles of the past, which while protective, were certainly more confining. Of course, these lonely individuals yearn for community, but they are really building new, restrictive boundaries around themselves⁶.

While in the global world languages, artistic expressions, trade, technologies and finance intertwine, the *differentialist* mindset, which makes every identity into a mini-fortress and a threat, is on the rise. The temptation to distinguish oneself in order to clash with the opposing side has two faces. On one side, there are the “killer identities” belonging to the fundamentalist and nationalistic school of thought, who are bringing back the ideas of race, peoples, and ethnicities, and building walls and borders, making boundaries sacred and imposing a nationalistic dictatorship on anyone coming from afar. However, there is also the other extreme that exalts “minority” cultures, not only to restore their dignity, and rightly so, but mainly to cancel a past of injustice. Justice, however, is often not served by this cancel culture that tears down all controversial symbols. Instead, it creates new chasms between cultures.

We are faced, therefore, with the need to escape from the grip of differentialist thinking just as we are from the one that imposes uniformity. On this point, the philosopher François Jullien differentiates between the *universal*, a prescribed, constitutive, and pre-established principle inherited from Greek philosophy; and the *uniform*, which means mass-conformity, or that which makes everyone seemingly equal in a consumer society, belonging to blind productivism and a market society. Jullien adds a third category of plurality, which is the *common*. If the term’s etymology really does derive from *cum-munus*, meaning exchange and reciprocity, then *communitas* therefore becomes the place where relationships are founded, where sharing occurs⁷.

After all, the intercultural route aims to develop precisely this idea of *common*. The purpose is to help make coexistence both possible and peaceful in a non-irenic society, and to develop a deep understanding, which is put to the test by differences. I

stress the words, “put to the test”. Although intercultural programs do not exist without a desire for unity, they only work *by way of* differences.

Can there be a future for coexistence if not through an “eschatological” struggle towards being-together, which recognizes differences while resisting the temptation of melting them down, but not ignoring or ghettoizing diversity either? The best way to respect a contemporary culture is to dialogue with it, metaphorically or not. And this is only possible based on a common search for universal values, when meanings are questioned and compared, as Emmanuel Lévinas suggests, on the basis of Sense. A careful and confident anthropological eye is needed that does not disdain, cover up or block out differences, but that does not idolize or freeze them in an immutable otherness either. While “too much familiar sameness” impoverishes and an extreme relativism creates a breakdown in communication, we need to think about differences by becoming involved in exchanges and dialogue, entering into the unique and singular cultural universe of each group, and allow the encounters with them to change our minds.

2

What kind of training in the intercultural field

Some suggestions can therefore be made to indicate the foundations and strategies for *critical* intercultural training. On one hand it “deconstructs” an idea of culture that is too abstract, reduced to an “object” that can be delineated on a map. On the other hand, it builds on the *common*⁸

- Education, with its meager tools, above all rejects the differentialist and culturalist way of thinking, even when it pretends to defend minorities. At the same time, it does not trust the overbearing universal mindset, nor the uniform, which makes everyone equal as a consumer.
- Instruction always aims for the middle ground between *cultural zero* and *cultural all*; or rather, between two opposing risks: the destruction of the cultural dimension or the opposite extreme, *culturalism*.
- It bases itself on a subjective and dynamic vision of culture, so that socio-economic standing, gender, and personal and family history; i.e., the elements that make up *super-diversity*, profoundly influence a person’s personality and their relationships⁹.
- Anyone who chooses the route of intercultural education knows that cultures are not pure, and that they never have been, not even from their beginnings. For this reason, it does not go looking for primordial elements which have supposedly been corrupted during the course of history. In other words, it does not believe that cultures exist outside of the irreducible subjectivity of people, who in turn are continuously changing with age, experience, migrations and relationships.
- Above all, this approach promotes a perspective of reciprocal transformation and not merely pure tolerance or relativism, let alone moral relativism, because the *common* demands giving things up, sacrifice, striving to understand and reciprocal transformation.
- This theoretical and conceptual framework should profoundly transform all educational training systems, including both in formal education (at all school levels, university and other courses) and informal (programs promoting peaceful coexistence and intercultural dialogue in the social arena, conflict resolution, etc.). Actually, this dynamic vision of culture and education is not always taken into consideration. After all, this resistance can be explained by the fact that educational programs based on a static idea of culture make them “easier” (but not more effective)¹⁰.

A culturalist style of education tends to *teach the other's culture* by inevitably simplifying it, and risks reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices instead of combatting them. An experiential type of training, on the other hand, should endeavor to *encounter the other*, aiming to cause a deeper change in the character and world view of the participants. This type of training, in fact, presents particular difficulty due to the resistance against questioning traditional roles and assuming a critical eye towards intercultural relations.

3

Models describing competence in pluralism

When reflecting on intercultural education in light of the aspects listed here so far, the concept of competence inevitably emerges as a dynamic set of knowledge and skills, which usually indicate a proficiency acquired in specific professional fields. In this sense, cross-cultural dialogue can also be considered a highly-developed internalized skill, which is connected to the ability to read, analyze and interpret unusual and complex situations.

Competence is needed to avoid creating tension in the social, cultural and personal elements at play in relationships, by understanding similarities and differences, modifications and overlapping elements. Many academic studies and research projects have focused on this concept, mainly in the form of “inventories”¹¹. Among the most well-known are from the experts of the Council of Europe, those by Byram Bennett or Darla Deardorff's checklists, where the following points are listed:

- *attitude* (open-mindedness, respect, curiosity, tolerance of ambiguity);
- *knowledge and skills* (cultural awareness, knowledge of one's own and other cultures, observation, ability to assess);
- *internal outcome* (adaptability, flexibility, empathy, decentralization);
- *external outcome* (behavior and communication appropriate to the situation).

In addition, research in the field has identified various other elements as components of intercultural competence, including:

- adaptability
- flexibility
- empathy
- respect
- openness
- tolerance of ambiguity¹².

In all of these examples, we are faced with *inventories and checklists*. In fact, many of these models are classifiable mainly as *Compositional Models*; that is, they show the components of an organized list, but without identifying how the items interact with each other. Consequently, in some lists the presentation of the various aspects or stages seems static and rigid; whereas cultural competence is, by its nature, contextual and dynamic. The *Developmental Models*, on the other hand, are more complex. They trace the development of competences on a continuum, where the elements influence each other reciprocally and where each impacts the others¹³.

At this point, some characteristics of cultural competence can be outlined, and above all contextualized, and its evolution over time can be studied; even though reversibility or regression is sometimes a risk. In fact, the competences are not acquired once and for all. They may be lost and remain unused in the case of unfavorable experiences or contexts that have a negative impact (the influence of mass-media, political and/or social conflict, competition among ethnic groups, etc.). On the

other hand, the capacity and the ability to be open-minded can emerge or reemerge through encountering the other. All the research clearly demonstrates, in fact, the importance of the environment for building and maintaining (or losing) attitudes of acceptance, openness, flexibility and empathy.

Again, the competence to deal with diversity is like a system in which all the different elements are interdependent. In a dynamic and multidimensional view, the elements that make up competence (empathy, flexibility, capacity to deal with prejudice...) all interact with each other.

Finally, intercultural competence cannot be built on an ethnorelative worldview that accepts all the elements of a culture in toto, without exercising the judgement necessary to search for common ground starting from discordant positions. The “nonjudgmental” attitude, connected to being open-minded and understanding towards others, which is found for the most part in all the inventories discussed here, sometimes appears to be incongruent. As previously stated, intercultural relations cannot refrain from judging or expressing disapproval for certain attitudes or behaviors that create discord, when these do not merely involve customs, but regard different values.

4

Training Strategies for developing intercultural sensitivity

Training that develops these skills requires reflection on the intercultural experience through interacting and encountering others instead of merely through a description. So that competence does not only come from *knowledge*, but also from *knowing how to be* and *knowing what to do*. Becoming adept does not depend so much on being exposed to content, but on having the opportunity to experiment and reflect on interactions with people from other cultures, which activates the necessary skills and capabilities.

An essential model of intercultural competence training that contributes to raising what can be defined as intercultural sensitivity should be based on an anthropological interpretation of reality rather than on the knowledge of predetermined notions. Aspects of personality and reflection should be central, making affectivity the basis of successful communication. In this sense, training needs to be directed towards the personalities of the workers and teachers, who in turn must mediate or facilitate understanding across diverse cultures.

The different elements of this model, as previously stated, all interact with each other. Interest and respect, for example, both condition the ability to communicate, and once learned, can create empathy. Analyzing one’s own stereotypes and prejudices creates openness, but this is likewise a condition for self-reflexivity. Training does not stop at promoting tolerance skills and mere acceptance, leaving people in separate spaces that never intersect. In order to achieve the training goals and overcome prejudices and misunderstanding, it is not enough to distance oneself from one’s own or other cultures. Instead, a *third space* of trust and reciprocal transformation must be built, where each person can change. Finally, intercultural competence contains an ethical-political dimension because it promotes a non-nationalist idea of citizenship that is global and based on the interdependence and peaceful understanding between peoples.

My personal experience in intercultural training with adults, teachers, educators, social workers, and missionary societies is inspired by these goals: To deconstruct the rigid idea of culture, immerse ourselves in the global, get used to a new sensibility and together build the common¹⁴. It is therefore based on real life stories, which are at times experienced with great suffering by people. They are discussed as a group and deciphered. Through work on these cases, on the stories, on the accidental mistakes and intercultural shock, a new sensitivity is acquired by following three key points:

- Deeply understanding the cultural expressions of people as tied up with their being men and woman, well-off or not, educated or ignorant, foreigner or native;
- Dealing with prejudices together;
- Nourishing the capacity to find a common horizon, one that unites and not divides.

A very interesting example comes from the training experience which took place at the Pontifical Universities, Theological Faculties, Missionary congregations and families, often people who proclaim the Gospel and are part of permanent missions that have a centuries-old experience of enculturation, especially from Europe towards the Americas, Africa and Asia. For further information on these themes, see the work of Luca Pandolfi and Enrica Ottone in this volume¹⁵.

Cultural and intercultural issues, especially in mission families, are changing. A major challenge that concerns the entire universal Church has arisen, especially in this post-Covid era¹⁶. The shift from the paternalistic European culture of the past – if not outright Western colonialism – to respecting “other” cultures, has been of fundamental importance and in part is the “merit” of missionaries. Although the era of paternalism is over, a new form of dialogue must be built, avoiding the mechanisms that would lead to a sort of generational turnover; i.e., the West’s turn has ended, now it is the turn of new countries.

Misunderstood relativism (every cultural environment has the right to express itself as it sees fit) would risk dividing not only Europeans/Westerners from the rest of the world, but also create chasms between people within the same country. Culture can provide a sense of belonging and affiliation, conferring identity in a complex world, but even in not so large communities people can divide themselves into groups. Nationality can be chosen as the easiest criterion for belonging, but conflicts can also arise between young and old, women against men, or even with respect to views on food or the environment.

Education can help decipher a new type of enculturation: No longer belonging to a “Culture” that corresponds to a country or an ethnic group, which by now has been deconstructed, fragmented and almost dissolved in globalization. Interculturality in religious and missionary life means becoming close to people who are themselves multi-cultural who live in the global world, and are conditioned by age, or their roles or their sex more than by cultural affiliation.

We therefore need to remove cultural implications within communities, and not fall into identity traps. We must distinguish between cultural dynamics and the dynamics of power. The distinction between social convention and moral significance is fundamental. The former is transitory and tied to context; the latter, even if it can vary over time, is founded in natural law. Social conventions can be relativized, but not respect for another person’s human dignity and rights.

In conclusion, our lodestar remains the question of meaning in light of the Gospels. Although they are placed in the cultural and linguistic universe of the era in which they were written, they cannot be compared in the same way with cultures of today. The Gospel remains a meta-cultural yardstick that converts us to overcome all bonds of identity and calls us to a greater sense of belonging. It gathers us together in universal brotherhood. It obligates us to understand others and ourselves more deeply, refining our sensitivity and building the “common” together.



Endnotes

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5. Cf. E. MORIN – A.B. KERN, *Terra-Patria*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano 1994; A. DAMASIO, *L'errore di Cartesio*, Adelphi, Milano 1994.
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7. Cf. F. JULLIEN, *L'universale e il comune. Il dialogo tra culture*, Laterza, Roma – Bari 2010.
8. Cf. M. SANTERINI, *Per una pedagogia interculturale critica: la ricerca tra "emergenza" e integrazione*, in G. CAPPUCCIO – S. COMPAGNO – S. POLENGHI (eds.), *30 anni dopo la Convenzione ONU sui diritti dell'infanzia. Quale pedagogia per i minori?*, Pensa Multimedia Editore, Lecce 2020, 1231-1241.
9. Cf. S. VERTOVEC, *Super-diversity and Its Implications*, "Ethnic and Racial Studies" 30 (2007) 6, 1024-1054.
10. Cf. C. ALLEMANN GHIONDA – C. PERREGAUX – C. DE GOUMOENS, *Pluralité linguistique et culturelle dans la formation des enseignants*, Editions Universitaire, Fribourg 1999.
11. A summary of the debate is found in C. BALLOI, *La diversità nei luoghi di lavoro. Modelli, approcci e competenza pedagogica interculturale per il Diversity Management*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2021.
12. The various models are discussed in M. SANTERINI, *Intercultural Competence Teacher-training Models: The Italian Experience* in OECD (Ed.), *Educating Teachers for Diversity: Meeting the Challenge*, Center for Educational Research and Innovation – OECD Publishing, Paris 2010, 185-201.
13. Cf. BALLOI, *La diversità*.
14. Cf. P. REGGIO – M. SANTERINI (Eds.), *Le competenze interculturali nel lavoro educativo*, Carocci, Roma 2014.
15. Cf. E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI, *Interculturality in Multicultural Learning Communities: An Educational Action-Research Project in Italy*, in IID. (eds.), *Education in Multiculturality, Education to Interculturality in Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy*, Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2023, 33-68.
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University, University Education and the Challenge of Interculturality as a Form of Life and Thinking*

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Abstract

This contribution takes as a starting point the claim that, in general, the current university institution is not only part of the hegemonic capitalist civilization of today but also represents one of the pillars that supports this civilization. This means, in the interpretation presented here, that the university has largely become a place that promotes the uniformity and homogenization that characterize the so-called “global culture”, which is understood here as a culture that reduces the plurality of the world and thus paradoxically disseminates a world that is “not much of a world”. Thus, in this contribution, the author argues in favor of an intercultural transformation of the university and the education it provides as a cultural and social necessity for the restitution of the depth and breadth of the world.

Keywords

University – Society – Civilization – Formation – Interculturality

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* Translated from the original Spanish by Kathryn Baecht

Introductory remarks

If I have understood its theme correctly, this International Congress takes as its central focus of reflection and discussion the issue of the challenge represented by intercultural education today, in particular within the framework of the pontifical universities.

In line with that concern, I would like to begin by indicating that I understand the title of my paper in the sense that interculturality, just as it demands a new way of life and of thinking born of the resonance in it of the polyphony of the world, constitutes a challenge for the current university institution in general, both in terms of the ordering and classifying of knowledge and also in relation to the education that it imparts.

At the same time, this understanding of the title of my paper means that I begin with a perception of the current university in which it appears as an institution that does not respond to the requests of cognitive justice, hermeneutics, and methodology, nor to the demands of anthropological transformation, which in the vision of intercultural philosophy will be necessary for the realization of a humanity that not only recognizes its factual multiculturalism and functionally manages public spaces for the tolerant coexistence of differences – as they may be, for example, specifically, universities that, for whatever reasons, juxtapose diverse knowledges in their order of studies; but also it rebirths, qualitatively enhanced in humanity through intercultural resonance in the loving coexistence of the differences in which it is embodied.

What explanation can be given for this negative perception of the current university as a place resistant to interculturality, moreover, as a place that contradicts the hope of a humanity in intercultural coexistence? In short, and to state it with total clarity, for me the reason that explains this perception lies in the fact that the current university has made a pact with the capitalist, hegemonic civilization that today decides the course of the development of the peoples of the world and, along with this, also the direction of the education needed in the so-called global societies of this world. In the context of this explanation, I permit myself to remember that in the Introduction of the Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis gaudium* Pope Francis wrote the following:

In all countries, universities constitute the main centers of scientific research for the advancement of knowledge and of society; they play a decisive role in economic social and cultural development, especially in a time like our own, marked as it is by rapid, constant and far-reaching changes in the fields of science and technology¹.

Pope Francis is totally correct with this assertion. But it is worth asking: Does this “decisive role” that universities now play in all of the countries of the contemporary world not come from the fact that they have been captured by the capitalist and hegemonic system of our civilization – a civilization that specifically has modern science and technology as one of its most decisive pillars and which claims for itself the monopoly of true access to the real and to life in general?

I think that this is the case, that this question can and must be answered in the affirmative; despite the undoubtable spaces of liberty that many professors and researchers find in universities, they are spaces that don't have sufficient influence to liberate the institution from the “fabric” of the system. For this reason, I think that one can also recognize that the difficulties that universities have with interculturality come from how institutions of education and research are, in general, at their base in the service of a world that constructs the civilization that it has captured. In other words, what obstructs the relationship between universities and interculturality, which should be an internal relationship and “innate” for the same idea and mission of the university as a “community conjured in the search of truth”², is its seat in and in its belonging to a mechanistic civilization that exploits it precisely to optimize the dynamics of its progress and consolidate its hegemony at the global level.

Obviously, in a world where there is hegemony, more specifically, where the interest in intensifying predominates, together with the help of formative institutions that disseminate a “global education” based in knowledge and skills that are supposedly universal and “necessary” for all of humanity, in such a world, I repeat, dialogue and interculturality cannot but appear as adversaries to keep at bay, that must be maintained “out of the walls”, because they endanger the civilized “order”. For this paper, it follows from the above that a critique of the established university system and the education that it imparts must commence by being a critique of the world that has domesticated the spirit of the university and that has exploited it to such an extent that it has robbed it of the original *ethos* that was alluded to previously.

My first point, then, will be a brief critical reflection about the “global” world that constructs the hegemonic civilization of today and that, in my opinion, as I have stated, is the backdrop for the current disagreement between university institutions and the vision of an alternative, intercultural world. A second point will then follow in which I will attempt to outline some considerations to meditate upon regarding the question that, for me, is critical because its answer depends on the university and interculturality being reunited and recognized as moments for the common spiritual movement for the good of humanity.

The question is the following: How can this, at times tacit, at times clearly explicit “pact” between the university and the world of hegemonic civilization be cancelled? The reflections that I share below are structured on these two points. I move now to the first reflection.

1

Today’s world of hegemonic civilization as a project adverse to intercultural humanity

It will be noted that I have alluded to the contemporary world that hinders the relationship between the university and interculturality by referring to the world of hegemonic civilization. And at this point, I speak from this world, in other words, I speak about the world in the limited sense that is imposed on it by the civilization that configures it, and I begin this point with this clarification because in order to understand the intention of the critique that follows, it’s important to keep in mind the following: this world of today is adverse to and challenges interculturality not because it is *the* world, but for quite the opposite, because it is not much of a world. Certainly, we have at our disposal many objects, apparatuses, and techniques of all kinds, including from a world with “new idols” as Pope Francis has indicated³. But all of this throws a shadow over the world as an open and welcoming space for places to live that have lives of their own.

What do I mean to say by this? I refer to a world that has been reduced to a model of civilization. So just as Ludwig Wittgenstein was able to declare that “...die Grenzen der Sprache... die Grenzen meiner Welt bedeuten” (“...the limits of language mean the limits of *my* world”)⁴ and Martin Heidegger for his part could affirm that: “Die Sprache ist das Haus des Seins. In ihrer Behausung wohnt der Mensch” (“Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells”)⁵, so too could the man of today say that the limits of his civilization are the limits of his world or that his civilization is the house of his world and that he has found his dwelling inside. This is, incidentally, very far from that other conception of the world by whose light Pope Francis says in his circular *Laudato si* that the “world”, even *today* is not only a problem to solve, but also a mystery⁶ that confronts its contemporaries with the work of caring for it as “the common house”.

I speak then of a world, if you will allow the expression, that has been put into the container of our civilization. There are many names that sociologists, above all, have tried to designate as the common denominator of the complete contents of the afore-

mentioned container. To cite only a few examples, we may recall names such as “the scientific-technical world”, “the world of consumer society”, “the world of risk society”, “the world of information and knowledge-based societies”, “the liquid world”, “the virtual world”, “the secularized world”, etc. etc. They are all, without doubt, names that help us to orient ourselves in our modern societies. But they are also names that betray a willingness to homogenization and, for the same reason, the intent to reduce or conceal the diversity of human life and its worlds. And they are equally names that conceal the paradoxical situation in which we find ourselves – a situation that has grave consequences specifically for the task of the forming of an intercultural consciousness – namely, the historical situation in which the more we progress in the construction of this world tailored to the hegemonic, mechanistic and capitalist civilization, the more we reverse in the experience of the world as a living organism with a metabolism marked by the open coexistence of differences.

In this way, in our so-called world of today, we witness, in fact, a spectacular process of substitution of the world in which a construction or program of civilization is being substituted for the world, to put it in traditional terms, as an organism or creation. It is necessary to pay attention to this because in the referred to process of substitution there occurs a change that intensifies the adverse character of the construction against interculturality. I refer to the fact that with the said substitution the fundamental references or cardinal points for the orientation of the human search for meaning are changed because it entails a rupture of the bonds with transcendence, with the natural, and even with the community.

The aforementioned substitution also implies a process of detranscendentalization of the real, of denaturalization of the human being, and decommunization of coexistence. But with this rupture of the bonds of connection that previously permitted man to feel like a being with roots in “heaven and earth”, the substitution of the world that we speak of here confronts us with one of those frightening issues that, if recourse to the title of a book by Kierkegaard⁷ is permitted, are issues that when dealt with provoke “fear and trembling”. The issue is the following: In this “world of today” will we not also be witnesses to a substitution of the memory or the *human* in the being of current man? This issue, as it appears appropriate to me to observe in an intellectual context in which the impacts of post humanist ideologies are discussed, does not put on the table the problem of the challenges that would be posed by a cultural situation in supposed transit towards a transhumanist perception of man⁸, but rather searches to figure out if in that “world of today” a type of human is emerging that, designed as a necessary analog to assure the establishment and optimize the operation of this its world, is content with being something like a store window or a display case for the contents of the container in which the hegemonic civilization encloses the world.

I confess that I don’t dare to give an affirmative answer to this question. Moreover, I think that it would not be prudent or just to affirm it, since we all know that there is more world than what the hegemonic civilization presents to us. But, on the other hand, I also think that there are abundant symptoms of individual and social behaviors in the “man of today” that permit us to speak of an *anthropological mutation* in progress, simply because of the impact that the current civilization exercises on the manner in which man understands and practices the relationship with himself or, if one prefers, with his interior life.

That is why I think we would do well to take this question seriously and ponder any reservations that we have, be they religious or secular, in order to confront that possible *anthropological mutation* and try to revert it. In short, we see that for interculturality the challenge of the “world of today” also contains, perhaps at its very heart, the anthropological challenge to clarify the human quality of men and women that must inhabit the world as their “common house”. I move now to the second point.

How to cancel the pact between the university and the world of the hegemonic civilization?

From what has been stated in the previous considerations, one can deduce that the relevance of the question that we raise in this second part, comes from the idea that without cancelling the pact with the epistemic, social, pedagogical, etc. order established by hegemonic civilization – in a word – without an *exodus* from hegemony, the university will not be able to convert itself into a place of education for intercultural coexistence situated in a world that has been freed for the diversity that gives it its density of meaning and as a world and that opens, along with it, the mystery that inhabits its own reality.

But how to become aware of the necessity of this rupture without naturally encouraging to offer “recipes” for the answer to this question – which in reality is a question that one must face from the respective contexts in which each university or academic community finds itself. Firstly, I would say the following: above all, in the framework of the pontifical universities, catholic or inspired by Christianity, in which this congress is situated, we can help ourselves begin by looking with honesty at the factual membership of the universities in the hegemonic order or to take charge, to put it in the terms of Father Ignacio Ellacuria SJ, up until his assassination in 1989, University of Central America “José Simeón Cañas” rector in San Salvador, of the “bourgeois structure” to which the administration and the programs of study of the university of the contemporary world respond⁹. And pause and think about the demands for the direction of education that derive from this membership, in order to contrast them with the higher requirement to contribute, as in intuitions of Christian inspiration, to the advent of the King of God and his justice.

Secondly, I would say that by discerning the mission of the university that entails the aforementioned contrast and conflict of demands that one uncovers a call to “take a stand” that could grow awareness for a change of seat or, as the theologians would say, a change of *Sitz im Leben* of the university. In other words: to cultivate the consciousness in order to leave the system and to enter into dialogue with life, which in this case signifies a dialogue with the cultures in which humanity cares for the diversity of the human and its roads of perfection. This second moment, if I do not misunderstand, incidentally corresponds with one of the fundamental criteria that Pope Francis named in his *Veritatis Gaudium*, specifically “Against this vast new horizon now opening before us, what must be the fundamental criteria for a renewal and revival of the contribution of ecclesiastical studies to a Church of missionary outreach?”¹⁰. It is the criteria of dialogue, that in this pontifical document is also specified in the precise sense of a dialogue that promotes a “culture of encounter” or “a culture of encounter between all the authentic and vital cultures”¹¹.

Thirdly, this dialogue would indicate in a precise manner the road to embark on for the change of place of the university, for its *exodus* from the hegemonic perspective, over the base of a new cartography that would make visible the multiple places of meaning of the human that have been buried, marginalized, or discredited as anachronisms by the mechanisms of the “planetary” system. In this manner, the university, would walk with the cultures and their wisdoms, seeing in them not simple and mute “objects of research” for knowledge professionals and students with a hunger for “data”, but as companions in the pilgrimage for the diversity of the world. Fourth, and finally, I would say that with this new cartography, the university can renew itself from a pluritopic perspective and nevertheless project itself at the same time as a place that summons the *congregation* of solidarity of the knowledge of humanity.

Why? Because if something can be learned by mutually allowing oneself to be accompanied by the “authentic and vital cultures”, in the pilgrimage for the world, it is that humanity again asks in each place and with its own accent the ancient question of Job: “But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understand-

ing?"¹². And is this not perhaps the question that an intercultural education should help to ask with increasing intensity? And is it not also the question that, as a last resort, should move us to the *exodus* of every system?

Final Observation

In conclusion, I would like to return to an issue that I presented earlier as open for debate, namely, the question of the *anthropological mutation*. I return to it, not because I want to specify my position in the debate, but rather because I think what is at issue within it serves as a fitting example to highlight the importance of intercultural dialogue in the current processes of university education. Therefore, this final observation is as follows: a university education that desires to prepare and train to confront the challenge that is already drawn on our horizon of life with what I have named the *anthropological mutation*, has need of a dialogue with the cultures of humanity, especially with the “authentic and vital” cultures.

Faced with the rise of a type of human that projects their existence, not in continuity with the memory of humanity that has oriented us until now, but rather from a rupture with it, the dialogue with traditional cultures and wisdoms that guard the memory of what is human as its most sacred possession, that dialogue represents, without a doubt, an inestimable aid in the development, for example, of a pedagogy of the resonance of the density of meaning in contexts and subjects in which those aforementioned memories barely find possibilities of echo anymore, whether it be because of processes of secularization, dynamics of rationalization of life, or the objectification of the subjective.

Nor does it seem superfluous to me to end this observation by adding that, specifically for the development of a pedagogy of intercultural resonance that helps to “wake up” the memory of humanity, migration, far from bringing a threat, as is thought of in many countries, represents a privileged field for teaching pedagogical practices of reciprocal resonance starting with daily coexistence.



Endnotes

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10. FRANCIS, *Veritatis Gaudium*, 5.
11. *Ivi*.
12. *Job* 20, 28.



Training in Pedagogical Research in Contexts of High Socio-Cultural Complexity*

❖ Davide Zoletto



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Abstract

This paper aims to present some theoretical issues currently emerging in educational research on intercultural training of teachers and educators. The paper starts by briefly presenting some theoretical backgrounds of current intercultural education research, with special reference to the field of intersectionality studies. It will then proceed to highlight the relevance of drawing on a postcolonial critical perspective in dealing with educational research within socio-culturally complex environments. To conclude, the paper will try to outline some possible educational perspectives aiming to enhance the inclusive character of socially and culturally complex training contexts.

Keywords

Training contexts – Intercultural training – Intercultural education – Sociocultural complexity

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* Translated from the original Italian by Polly Brooks

1

Theoretical premises: complexity, intersectionality

In order to reflect on the theme of this conference – “Multicultural Communities for Which Formation?” – in other words, on the projects, paths, knowledge, and skills that can emerge within training contexts characterised by socio-cultural and linguistic diversity and complexity, it may be useful to start from an awareness that now seems to be firmly present in the field of pedagogical-intercultural research¹: that is, the fact that most of today’s training and educational contexts are characterised by heterogeneity that we cannot reduce to one single key of interpretation.

We could say in particular that – far from being possible to describe and understand them only (or mainly) by proceeding from a series of presumed “cultures” that are predefined or in any case rigid (and that one would presume would determine the paths of individuals and groups in a linear manner) – today’s educational contexts, as well as people’s experiences, turn out to be characterised by a diversity which is in fact made up of a plurality of cultural and linguistic repertoires. On the other hand, those same repertoires are also enriched (and diversified) by virtue of generational and socio-economic aspects that have, perhaps, just as much of an impact on the emerging complexity of educational contexts as they do on more strictly cultural and linguistic aspects, without neglecting the relevance of exploring this same complexity in the light of gender differences, as the scholars working in the field of intersectionality studies naturally teach us².

All these elements – and many others with them – are in fact ‘intertwined’ today in the personal and training paths of individuals and groups. Indeed, to take up precisely the perspective of the above-mentioned studies on intersectionality, we could say, perhaps, that today more than ever, what surfaces – among trainers, educators, teachers, researchers – is the awareness that training pathways, as well as more generally people’s experiences, emerge in the intersection of such a heterogeneity of aspects.

With regard to the ways in which these intersections occur, there are at least two elements that seem important to recall here, since they appear to be of particular relevance from a pedagogical point of view, as well as for the training of teachers and educators. First of all, the fact that, according to an intersectional perspective, the interweaving (“intersection”) between the different aspects does not take place on the basis of predefined differences, i.e. not on the basis of presumed “essences”; rather, in line with what has just been said about the importance of avoiding “culturalist” readings in the analysis of heterogeneous and complex educational contexts, the “differences” themselves should be thought of from a “relational” perspective. In other words, differences should be described as *relations* between elements: they would therefore not precede interactions (differences as predefined ‘essences’), but would emerge from the interactions themselves (differences *as relations*). It is no coincidence, for instance, that if we refer to the field of cultural production/reproduction, transmission/transformation, a scholar such as Arjun Appadurai has highlighted the importance of privileging the use of the adjective ‘cultural’ (in reference to the various possible ‘cultural’ dimensions) rather than the noun ‘culture’, which could more easily entail running the risk of making essentialist assumptions³. This aspect of difference as a relationship, is one that appears to be of particular significance for pedagogical research, if we consider the central importance that the relationship – and in particular the “educational relationship” – assumes in the educational sphere, especially in reference to the “taking shape”, in the educational relationship, of the paths of persons in training.

Secondly, a further element that appears particularly significant from a pedagogical point of view is the awareness – clearly expressed in a number of contributions in the field of intersectionality studies⁴ – that people’s training paths not only emerge in the relationship/interaction between different elements, but also take shape within

historical-social contexts that are never ‘neutral’, but charged with relationships often characterised by ‘asymmetries’ in the positioning of the various subjects. It is no coincidence that Gill Valentine speaks in this sense of ‘power-laden spaces’⁵. From the pedagogical point of view, we may, for instance, think of the very unequal possibilities that, in different territories/contexts, trainees have of accessing the various resources (material and immaterial) necessary for each of them to mature/express their potential (their ‘capacities’, in Nussbaumian terms) to the full. We need only think of the numerous studies that monitor old and new poverty today, as well as specifically educational poverty⁶. It is perhaps with reference to these different possibilities of access to resources (including cultural and educational) on the part of different social groups, that Ulf Hannerz proposed using the notion of ‘creolisation’ to describe the heterogeneity emerging in contemporary complex societies⁷.

At the same time, particularly with regard to so-called ‘intercultural’ relations in highly complex contexts, one cannot underestimate the importance of the fact that specific educational contexts bear the marks of equally specific historical paths, especially with reference to the long ‘colonial’ season, as well as to the various processes of decolonisation.

On one hand, attention to this should make us aware of the risks (to which we will soon return) that some elements of the “colonial” type of educational relations (and the epistemological and discursive assumptions on which they rested and to which they contributed in facilitating) are present even today – more or less explicitly – in contexts and in contemporary educational practices: suffice it to think of analyses, albeit diverse, like those of Achille Mbembe on the present “postcolony” scenario and that of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on the continuance of colonial modalities in many of today’s educative contexts, both in the North and in the South of the planet⁸. See also, in the context of the Italian debate, the risks already highlighted some time ago by Milena Santerini or Massimiliano Fiorucci, among others⁹.

On the other hand, this attention to relations that developed historically in colonial, decolonial and post-colonial contexts could help us to mature, even within the pedagogical-intercultural field, the awareness that these relations should never be read only in a univocal and linear sense. One thinks of Paul Gilroy’s studies on circulation and exchanges/transformations emerging in the context of the ‘Black Atlantic’¹⁰, or the suggestions we find in Michel de Certeau’s analyses of the ways in which the presence of the “other” can also emerge in the context of “colonial” relations as a presence that limits/alters colonial space as a “space of appropriation”¹¹.

2

A critical postcolonial perspective in teacher and educator training

A pedagogical research approach inspired by a critical postcolonial perspective seeks to distance itself (a *critical* distance in fact) from the epistemological assumptions emerging from colonial-type relations¹². First and foremost, from the tendency to distinguish/contrapose – according to rigid binary type thinking – “us” and “them”: this contraposition was based on and nourished by systems of knowledge/power that contributed to the rigid and stereotyped construction both of the “other” and – conversely, and in a complementary manner – of the “us” as taught by now classic analyses such as those of Edward Said¹³. In fact, as Miguel Mellino has rightly remarked, Said – starting from Foucauldian analyses of the functioning of processes of knowledge/power in the genesis of Western modernity – set out to show how “the West’s domination over the East [functioned] also by producing certain ‘discourses’ about the other”¹⁴. In this sense, as is well known, Said invites us to remember – and it is Mellino again who emphasises this – that we should consider “colonialism and imperialism not only as political-economic phenomena but as dis-

cursive formations or regimes aimed at the production of certain images or stereotypes of cultural otherness functional both to the creation of a Western culture or identity and to its hegemony or domination over the rest of the planet”¹⁵.

In the light of this, we could consider how the construction and functioning of these discursive formations or regimes was necessarily also based on the diffusion of certain discourses on education, including perhaps, first and foremost, those relating to the alleged “civilising colonisation”, the paradoxes of which were drawn attention to by the aforementioned de Certeau¹⁶. But just as many examples of this kind may be found in the field studies conducted by anthropologists interested in the historical role played by Western-based educational institutions in various contexts of cultural contact, for example, in the thoughts of the aforementioned Hannerz on the paradoxes connected to the diffusion of so-called literacy in Africa (particularly, in the case of Hannerz’s research, in the Nigerian context)¹⁷. Or in Barbara Rogoff’s insights into how, in the North American context of the late 19th and early 20th century, schooling was often seen as a tool “to change the customs and habits of native communities”, as “a means by which to ‘civilise’ the Indians”¹⁸.

One of the “colonial” elements that have long innervated certain parts of the pedagogical discourse (and on which certain educational practices in highly complex contexts are perhaps still based today) was the stereotype of the “other” as lacking in cultural/symbolic resources and almost always only to be civilised/helped/corrected. See, in this sense, the lucid critique made on several occasions of this assumption/stereotype by the aforementioned Spivak, an author who is one of the main points of reference in the field of postcolonial studies. In her works, Spivak has also often manifested specific attention to certain aspects of pedagogical discourse, including, in some cases, the issues of teacher training, as can be seen in her reflections on and experience with, teachers in rural schools in West Bengal, as described, for example, in the text *Righting Wrongs*¹⁹. In that same piece, she dwells on some aspects of her work as a teacher in the field of humanities in a context of the Global North (Spivak is a professor at Columbia University in New York), and her description of one of the changes in attitude that establishes a critical distance from at least that particular colonial stereotype is especially effective: “The first condition and effect is a suspension of the conviction that I am necessarily better, I am necessarily indispensable, I am necessarily the one to right wrongs, I am necessarily the end-product for which history happened, and that New York is necessarily the capital of the world”²⁰. In this sense, Spivak shows the direction in which to move, but this also allows us to grasp the assumption to be left behind: It is a direction that appears particularly relevant especially when considering the sphere of training for those who will be or are called upon to operate educationally in heterogeneous contexts, because it highlights the importance of working on a position that appears theoretical, ethical and pedagogical at the same time, and to which we should ‘coach ourselves’ as trainers, educators, teachers.

If we accept Spivak’s invitation and also try to adopt, at least at times, a critical postcolonial perspective, we can attempt to reflect on what might be some remaining colonial-type assumptions in the strictly pedagogical sphere, and in particular in the context of training educators/teachers called upon to operate in multicultural and heterogeneous contexts.

We can be guided in this direction by the work of the American researcher Christine Sleeter, who – in addition to having extensively studied topics such as *multicultural education* and anti-racist education in different educational contexts – has also worked extensively in the specific field of teacher training for teachers called upon to work in highly complex and heterogeneous educational institutions. In a 2010 article entitled *Afterword. Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Reflection*²¹, Sleeter very thought-provokingly focuses on some of the critical issues/difficulties she has come across in her initial teacher training activities, particularly with regard to how the meaning of culturally responsive teaching is often misunderstood.

On the one hand, Sleeter observes, there is the risk (to which we have already drawn attention to some extent) of essentialising ‘differences’²² and thereby interpreting the pathways of individual learners by tracing them back to a set of elements usually – and very often somewhat arbitrarily or at least reductively – associated with certain cultural and social groups²³, thus neglecting the plurality of intersections dwelt on at the beginning of this contribution.

On the other hand – and this is a second risk, connected in some way to the previous one – we might think that it is a matter of teaching learners ‘their’ cultures²⁴ at this point, which would in a certain sense imply representing them (and the other in general) as a sort of ‘tabula rasa’ that we would be called upon to ‘fill in’. On the contrary, it is precisely from the learners’ strengths, from the knowledge and skills they already possess – and which are also connected to their diversified cultural and linguistic repertoires – that we can design learning and teaching environments, paths, situations. This is, in a certain sense, the criticism that Paulo Freire already made of any ‘depository’ type of education, that is to say, of a form of education that ‘nullifies or minimises the creative power of those being educated’²⁵. To which is added – again in Freire’s words – “all social action of a paternalistic nature”²⁶.

There are then two further ‘dangers’ against which Sleeter again, warns us²⁷, and which she highlights as also emerging at times in the contexts of training, and in her case, as mentioned above, of teacher training. That is to say, on one side, there is the fact that we often struggle to grasp the complexity of educational contexts and therefore tend to look for solutions that respond to only one aspect of that complexity, thus running the risk of implementing actions that are sometimes simplistic or in any case far removed from the concreteness of the contexts, while on the other is the risk associated with the difficulty we most often make in ‘seeing’ the culturally/socially/historically constructed character of ‘our’ pedagogical theories/practices, with the consequent tendency to confer on them – often unconsciously – a character of presumed universality and neutrality, while it is often only to the pedagogical theories/practices of others that we attribute a ‘cultural’ character.

3

Possible ways of working

It is not always easy to be aware of these risks. As Sleeter herself suggests – and as emerges, precisely, from a critical postcolonial perspective on education in heterogeneous contexts – these are assumptions that often remain implicitly at the basis of both our theoretical reflections and the educational formation we put into practice. How can we try to keep our guard up against them? And how can we then try to imagine and construct training/learning/socialisation environments that seek to combine such self-critical awareness with effective sustainability/feasibility/transferability in contexts and practices? However, on closer inspection, these are the two sides of the same question, since – according to the hypothesis outlined so far – it is also starting from a broadening/diverting of the theoretical outlook that we can describe, interpret and subsequently try to accompany/guide some aspects of today’s highly complex contexts. It is possible to try to sketch out some possible avenues of work, with specific reference to the question of the training/self-education of those who are preparing to work in heterogeneous, *multi-* and *intercultural*, multilingual contexts.

If we bear in mind the aforementioned risks pointed out, for example, by Said, a first direction to work towards, also in the contexts of training of trainers, could be that of trying to equip ourselves to move away from a theoretical-pedagogical approach of a purely “binary” type; in other words, it would be a matter of trying to train ourselves to read complexity and intersections, starting with those closest (at least potentially) to teachers and educators in training. An interesting track could be, in this sense, that of starting from (and enhancing) the characteristics of heterogeneity, interculturality and

plurilingualism also of the same learning contexts/environments in which educators and teachers are trained. One thinks, for example, both of classrooms and courses, including university courses, and of the contexts in which any internship, apprenticeship, service learning, etc. activities take place. In order to move in this direction, we should, among other things, acquire reading keys/tools that allow us to read heterogeneous, *multi-* and *intercultural* and multilingual contexts, highlighting not only their weaknesses and problems, but also (above all) their strengths: those of the persons undergoing training, families, groups, communities, but also of the teachers and educators and of the institutions in which they are trained and operate²⁸.

It is again Sleeter who provides us with a valuable insight (and a valuable suggestion) in this sense, when she suggests that learning to teach/educate in a manner sensitive to cultural diversity (the aforementioned culturally responsive teaching) “begins with dialogue (between teacher and students, between teacher and parents, and so on) and with the teacher’s own willingness to spend time as a learner in the community of his or her pupils”²⁹. Mutatis mutandis, we find in these words a Freirean overtone, of the Freire who suggested that, in order to be able to teach, we must learn first from our pupils, bringing into focus, for example, generating words and themes from which to build paths, together with communities in fact, that would really attempt to be paths of consciousness-raising and emancipation as well. “I have learnt to practise teaching that is attentive to cultural diversity”, writes Sleeter not surprisingly, “departing from dialogue and placing myself within other cultural contexts, and supporting and extending that learning through formal study”³⁰.

In other words, Sleeter points to a circularity of practice and *reflection on practice* that – in addition to being a consolidated and essential modality of teacher and educator training – can have an additional value in terms of training together to educate, teach/learn in highly heterogeneous contexts: in such contexts, in fact, practice exposes us on a daily basis to socio-cultural and linguistic complexity, and shared reflection on practice, and also from the standpoint of colleagues and trainers, it helps us to broaden our outlook and increase our awareness of the situated character of our pedagogical, didactic, organisational cultures as well.

It is no accident that it is yet again Sleeter to explain that “a large part of [her] work as a teacher trainer consisted in placing future teachers in the position of learners in community contexts that were unfamiliar to them”³¹, guiding them “in their learning” within communities with tools such as structured interviews and observation guides from which reflections emerged that could ultimately be valorised as a basis for classroom discussion. guiding them ‘in their learning’ within communities with tools such as structured interviews and observation guides from which reflections emerged that could ultimately be used as a basis for classroom discussion³². This is, after all, the aforementioned circularity between shared reflection and practice, through which we can train ourselves in that shift in/expansion of outlook to which a critical postcolonial perspective summons us.

Trying to work in this direction on the level of pedagogical, didactic and organisational culture(s), with specific reference to the training of educators and teachers called upon to operate in heterogeneous, multi, intercultural and multilingual contexts, could also be important not only in recognising the plurality and heterogeneity of these cultures, and thus their historically, socially, culturally constructed character. It could also help us to look at the ways in which these characteristics structure (often without our being aware of it) the contexts and practices within which teachers/educators are formed. And this could help us – when designing training environments, pathways and situations – to become aware of how these historically situated characteristics may themselves turn out to be, not only weaknesses, but also barriers or obstacles to the participation of future teachers and educators. In some cases, in fact, this “long tour” (of anthropological³³ as well as postcolonial inspiration), through plurality and complexity could help us to rediscover (or sometimes to see for the first

time, perhaps) some of the strengths of those pedagogical, didactic and organisational cultures that guide our daily practices, the richness of which we too often fail to grasp, precisely because we perhaps take them too much for granted.

It seems of primary importance, in this sense, to ‘train’ ourselves – right from the formation stage – to work as a team, in collaboration (‘train together’), to try – as Anna Maria Piussi³⁴ has suggested – to broaden our outlook, to grasp interdependencies, to improve our self-observation capacities, to place our reflection/action in a participatory (intersubjective) process. In this direction, a valuable contribution can still be made today by approaches inspired by Action Research, which, as Chiara Bove has happily summarised, can help us to mature (train) *at the same* time the ability to root our educational action within specific contexts and the ability to maintain a distance, and therefore a critical and self-critical reading of the contexts themselves and of our practices within them³⁵. Of course, as Bove herself reminds us, it is not always easy for “those who work in the field”, immersed right in the complexity of everyday educational work, to also become “researchers, therefore capable of mediating between perspectives, points of view, theoretical readings of problems, systematic use of methods, production of new knowledge”³⁶. And, in any case, it seems interesting, as the author herself notes, “to understand action-research as a flexible methodology” that, even if not always “reproducible tout-court” in educational contexts (the author refers to school, but one could probably extend her reflection to non-formal contexts), can constitute a reference from which “to deduce guiding criteria for training and for educational/didactic action in an intercultural perspective”³⁷, as well as perhaps – according to the path that we have tried to outline in this contribution – even in a post-colonial perspective: in an attempt to acquire keys of interpretation that help us ‘be/inhabit’ in a pedagogically oriented way in the complexity/uncertainty that characterises today’s educational contexts.



Endnotes

1. See for example Z. BAUMAN – A. PORTERA, *Education and Intercultural Identity*, Routledge, London 2021; M. CATARCI – M. FIORUCCI (eds.), *Intercultural Education in the European Context. Theories, Experiences, Challenges*, Ashgate, Farnham 2015; M. FIORUCCI, *Educazione, formazione e pedagogia in prospettiva interculturale*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2020; M. FIORUCCI – F. PINTO MINERVA – A. PORTERA (edd.), *Gli alfabeti dell'intercultura*, ETS, Pisa 2016; S. NANNI – A. VACCARELLI (edd.), *Intercultura e scuola. Scenari, ricerche, percorsi pedagogici*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2019; M. SANTERINI, *Pedagogia socioculturale*, Bruno Mondadori, Milano 2019; M. TAROZZI, *Dall'intercultura alla giustizia sociale. Per un progetto pedagogico e politico di cittadinanza globale*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2015.
2. See for example L. McCALL, *The Complexity of Intersectionality*, "Sign" 30 (2005) 3, 1771-1800; G. VALENTINE, *Theorizing and Researching Intersectionality: A Challenge for Feminist Geography*, "The Professional Geographer" 59 (2007) 1, 10-21.
3. Cf. A. APPADURAI, *Modernità in polvere* (1996), trad. it. Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2012², 21-22.
4. See for example VALENTINE, *Theorizing and Researching Intersectionality*.
5. *Ibid.*, 19.
6. See for example on this last point the various work carried out by Save the Children starting from the proposal to identify a specific Index of Educational Poverty (see SAVE THE CHILDREN, *La lampada di Aladino. L'Indice di Save the Children per misurare le povertà educative e illuminare il futuro dei bambini in Italia*, Roma 2014, as well as the various works that the same organisation has promoted on these issues over the following years).
7. Cf. U. HANNERZ, *Transational Connections. Cultura, People, Places*, Routledge, London – New York, NY 2001.
8. Cf. A. MBEMBE, *On the Postcolony*, The Regents of the University of California – University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA 2000 and G.C. SPIVAK, *Etics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee e Certain Scenes of Teaching*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2019.
9. Cf. M. SANTERINI, *Educazione interculturale e strategie contro il razzismo*, in EAD. (ed.), *Processi educativi e integrazione culturale*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 1996, 65-67; M. FIORUCCI, *Narrazioni tossiche e dialogo interculturale*, "MeTis. Mondi educativi. Temi, indagini, suggestioni", 9 (2019) 2, 15-34.
10. Cf. P. GILROY, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double-Consciousness*, Harvard University Press – Verso, London 1993.
11. Cf. M. DE CERTEAU, *L'invenzione del quotidiano* (1980), trad. it. Edizioni Lavoro, Roma 2000, 220ss.
12. Cf. M.A. MELLINO, *La critica postcoloniale*, Meltemi, Roma 2005.
13. Cf. E. SAID, *Orientalismo. L'immagine europea dell'Oriente* (1978), trad. it. Feltrinelli, Milano 1999.
14. Translated from the italian original: MELLINO, *La critica postcoloniale*, 42.
15. *Ibid.*, 44.
16. Cf. DE CERTEAU, *L'invenzione del quotidiano*, 225-226.
17. Cf. HANNERZ, *La diversità culturale*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2001, 110.

18. Cf. B. ROGOFF, *La natura culturale dello sviluppo*, trad. it. Raffaello Cortina, Milano 2004, 355-358.
19. Cf. G. CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK, *Righting Wrongs*, in N. OWEN (ed.), *Human Rights, Human Wrongs*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003, 168-227.
20. *Ibid.*, 181.
21. Cf. C.E. SLEETER, *Afterword. Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Reflection*, "Journal of Praxis in Multicultural Education", 5 (2010) 1, 116-119.
22. Cf. *ibid.*, 117.
23. Cf. *ivi*.
24. Cf. *ivi*.
25. Cf. P. FREIRE, *Pedagogia degli oppressi (Pedagogy of the Opressed, 1968)*, trad. it. Edizioni Gruppo Abele, Torino 2002², 60.
26. *Ivi*.
27. Cf. SLEETER, *Afterword. Culturally responsive teaching*, 117.
28. For a more in depth attempt at reflection in this direction, cf. D. ZOLETTO, *A partire dai punti di forza. Popular culture, eterogeneità, educazione*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2019, as well as – with explicit reference to teacher training in highly complex school contexts. Ricerca-azione e collaborazione fra docenti, in P. FLOREANCIG – F. FUSCO – F. VIRGILIO – F. ZANON – D. ZOLETTO (eds.), *Ricerca-azione e trasformazione delle pratiche didattiche. L'esperienza del Piano pluriennale di formazione per le scuole ad alta incidenza di alunni stranieri*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2019, 66-74.
29. SLEETER, *Afterword. Culturally Responsive Teaching*, 117.
30. *Ivi*.
31. *Ibid.*, 117-118.
32. Cf. *ivi*.
33. See in this regard F. REMOTTI, *Noi primitivi. Lo specchio dell'antropologia*, nuova ediz. accr. Boringhieri, Torino 2009.
34. Cf. A.M. PIUSSI, *Il senso libero della libertà. La posta in gioco di una civiltà desiderabile*, "Encyclopaideia", XV, 29 (2011) 33.
35. Cf. C. BOVE, *Pensare con metodo e logica dell'indagine: la ricerca-azione per la formazione e l'azione nella scuola multiculturale*, "Educazione Interculturale. Teorie, Ricerche, Pratiche" 17 (2019) 1, 67.
36. *Ibid.*, 68.
37. *Ivi*.



Sociology and Intercultural Relations

Between Hegemonic Research Practices and the Critical Gaze*

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Abstract

Within the context of an interdisciplinary discussion on the epistemological statutes and research practices inherent to interculturality, this essay aims to reflect on the emancipatory potential of the discipline of sociology, in particular of that branch of sociology that looks at cultural differences. In order to reach this goal we need to question both the ways in which cultural differences reflexively transform the discipline and the heuristic validity of the analytical categories with which sociology has gained legitimacy. By chronologically articulating some of the main stages of the conceptualisation of ethnic and race relations – from Max Weber, Robert Park, William Du Bois to the more recent approach of Southern epistemologies and intersectional, post-colonial, and de-colonial feminist approaches – the essay highlights the hegemonic responsibilities of sociological reflection on intercultural relations. At the same time, it dwells on those critical views which, starting from the denunciation of the Eurocentric (but also patriarchal and bourgeois) character of the sociological canon, point the way to emancipatory research practices. Finally, the essay recalls the importance of a historical and reflexive sociology.

Keywords

Intercultural relations – Interculturality – Multiculturality – Critical sociology – Emancipatory research practices – Historical and reflexive sociology

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* Translated from the original Italian by Polly Brooks

Introduction

My contribution to this interdisciplinary dialogue on epistemological statutes and research practices inherent to multiculturalism and interculturality will have a sociological slant. The aim is to share a reflection on the emancipatory potential of the sociological discipline and in particular of that branch of sociology that turns its gaze to cultural differences and to the coexistence between them. This commitment requires us to question first of all the possibility that cultural differences can reflexively transform this discipline, and the ways in which this may happen; but asks us, at the same time, to question the heuristic validity of the analytical categories with which sociology has gained legitimacy, taking into account the contexts (including geographical contexts) in which they have been produced and the canons that have been defined, whose implications in ethnocentric and essentialist terms are today more widely recognised and denounced.

In order to pursue this objective – a complex objective which would require an articulate genealogy of sociological thought as well as an accurate historicization – I have had to make choices and effect reductions which I believe, however, will be able to restore the process of affirmation, and the responsibility in hegemonic terms, of a discipline that came into being with modernity and which as such confronts social and cultural differences right from the outset. I will briefly bring attention to Weberian thinking on the categories of race and ethnicity and to that of the Chicago school to whom is owed the earliest systemisation in the analysis of *race relations*; these thematisations will be placed in dialogue with an author who was, for many years, disregarded; William E. B. Du Bois. This first passage allows us to highlight the problematic, even pernicious, union between the need for new knowledge that seeks to focus on the transition from community to society and its ideological foundations. A second passage of my reflection – a passage that is also of a chronological nature – is dedicated to the comparison between the so-called epistemologies of the North and the epistemologies of the South: hence the proposal of an emancipatory sociology created by Boaventura de Sousa to guide us in the critique of Western sociological imagination and its analytical distortions, which appear to be the product of the processes of modernization and the colonial experience. The concepts of the abyssal line, the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences will be evoked.

A third passage of my reasoning – in the wake of a *pars construens* – evokes the need to reflect on the relationships to cultural differences, first of all by declining the latter in the plural and, at the same time, keeping the multiple cultural differences (of ethno-racial type, but also of gender, age, class) jointly in consideration if the objective of sociology is to consist in being a critical discipline, capable of exposing the apparatus of domination that regulates cultural differences, naturalising them, transforming them into inequalities. The intersectional perspective and that of postcolonial and decolonial feminisms are discussed here in relation to their theoretical and empirical value. The intervention closes by recalling the importance of a historical and reflexive sociology.

1

Max Weber, William Du Bois and Chicago School race relations studies

The choice to begin my reflection by placing Max Weber, Robert Park – the central figure of the Chicago School who is credited with the first theorisations on race relations – and William Du Bois in dialogue, is dictated by the different degree of influence that these authors, from different places and at different times, have had in elaborating the sociological view of intercultural relations. These are three coeval authors: Weber and Park are of the same age (they were born in 1864), Du Bois is a few years younger (he was born in 1868); Park and Du Bois are US citizens; Weber is German.

Their paths – intellectual and personal – often crossed, both in the United States of America – where Weber went in 1904 for three months with his sociologist wife Marianne Weber on the occasion of the Congress of Arts and Science in St. Louis – and in Germany, in Heidelberg and Berlin, where Robert Park and William Du Bois¹ studied. The colour line², i.e. their ethno-cultural background and the colour of their skin, weighs just as dramatically on their interpersonal relations as it does on their specific research on ethnic and race relations. As is well known, Max Weber is, together with Simmel and Durkheim, part of what is termed the sacred triad of sociology. In his monumental work, he touched on, albeit marginally, the theme of race and ethnicity, particularly in regard to nation building. In *Economy and Society*³, Weber deals with the idea of nation by placing it in relation to ethnic community and racial affiliation. While racial affiliation is ‘really’ based on a community of origin (i.e. a community of blood, of biological factors), Weber writes, ethnic affiliation, on the other hand, is based on perception, i.e. the subjective belief that one is part of a community of origin. Like ethnic community, nation is based on a belief in a shared life, on sentiment, on collective representation, but unlike ethnic community, it is fuelled by a passion for political power – for the greatness of the nation, to be exact. The elements that allow ethnicity to consolidate are, according to Weber, language and religion, which generate cognitive proximity and the sharing of the ultimate meaning of existence. To these two elements, the German sociologist adds the political dimension. The political community utilises the symbolism of the blood community, the family clan, the primordial and mythological origin, and represents the most artificial form from which the belief in the ethnic-type bond originates.

If race, by virtue of its biological ‘validity’, is a category that should not concern sociology, ethnicity and nation, by virtue of the social representations concerning them, are instead concepts whose elaboration and clarification sociology is obliged to deal with. It is a mature Weber who dilutes the colour line that was also present in his youthful writings of the 1890s⁴ and that dealt with the ‘Polish question’, the study of the condition of agricultural workers in the Prussian provinces east of the Elbe⁵. As Elke Winter⁶ has suggested, it is necessary to place Weber’s reflections on race in the historical era in which he lived: an era in which the division of humanity into biologically different races was accepted and social inequalities were interpreted as the gap between the subjects’ natural dispositions. However, Weber resisted the development of such ideological views in the field of social research, emphasising that racial characteristics did not determine social action.

His trip to the United States of America is an opportunity to nurture his interest in intercultural relations: he focuses his attention, for example, on the reasons for the increased discrimination perpetrated by the white population towards African Americans rather than towards Native Americans. The reasons, in Weber’s eyes, are not to be ascribed to ‘anthropological differences’ but rather to the weight of memory that anchors them inextricably to slavery and its institutionalisation. The causes are therefore due to the white population’s sense of superiority; racial inequalities are institutional, fed primarily by the education system⁷. Weber took an interest in the studies of William E. B. Du Bois, whom he met again on the American trip (the two had met in Berlin during Du Bois’s study stay between 1892 and 1894). His study of the plight of African Americans⁸ and the processes of racialisation of which they are victims contributes to the Weberian interest in ‘ethnic’ relations and the pervasiveness of racism. Du Bois is a scholar whose intellectual biography is emblematic in terms of the hegemonic processes in sociological production. His being non-white has in fact undermined his scientific legitimisation as much in the field of reflection on ethnic and racial relations as in relation to the emergence of American sociology. He embodies the ‘rejected’⁹ scholar: because of the social milieu of the time, steeped in anti-Afro-American racism in which the dominant and hegemonic practices of white (male) sociologists are also to be found, he was systematically and deliberately marginalised by the nascent Amer-

ican academy. Du Bois – whose scientific commitment is not dissociated from his political-militant one – always rejected social Darwinism and any form of a reasoning regarding natural laws in the understanding of ‘social facts’, preferring an exclusively social and historical interpretation of the condition of black Americans and the racial inequalities that located them at the bottom of the social strata. This is the hallmark of the Atlanta school of sociology that Du Bois founded as a former student.

It is in the collection of historical and sociological essays *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)¹⁰ that Du Bois presents three key concepts of his thinking – the ‘double consciousness’, the ‘colour line’ and the ‘veil’. The scholar, with lucid foresight, predicts for the America of the 20th century ‘the problem of the colour line’ that can be understood in relation to the ‘double consciousness’ experienced by the African American population.

«It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder»¹¹.

While in Atlanta, Du Bois is welding intellectual and civic commitment¹², in Chicago the emerging ‘white sociology’ finds in the figure of Robert Park its pygmalion. Within a handful of years Du Bois had published *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), Durkheim had published *The Suicide*¹³ and in 1892 the Department of Sociology had been founded in Chicago. Surprisingly, despite the innovation of his many works, innovative also in terms of methodology (a forerunner of mixed-methods), Du Bois is not counted among the founding fathers of American sociology¹⁴ – a fate which did not befall only Du Bois¹⁵. A slightly older and lesser-known Robert Park – and the entire Chicago Sociology Department – would deliberately marginalise and exclude him from the sociological canon also through the instrumental use of Du Bois’s more political conflict with Booker T. Washington, founder of the Tuskegee Institute and at that time the most influential African-American leader thanks to his integrationist and conciliatory policies between blacks and whites. Morris¹⁶ writes in this regard that Park and the Chicago school excluded Du Bois from the American sociological community by systematically ignoring his work “because of the colour of his skin and the challenges to Park’s racist remarks”¹⁷. Du Bois is highly critical of both Park’s ‘Darwinist’ reading of race and ethnic relations and the concept of assimilation with which Park reads the ‘inevitable’ process of civilisation of European migrants in the city of Chicago and US society. A reading of urban ecology that does not grasp the deep seated mechanisms behind the actions of racism perpetuated by whites. Already in this first act, this nascent sociology falls into the colour trap.

2

Epistemologies of the North and Epistemologies of the South

From the very first pages of *Epistemologies of the South*¹⁸, the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos makes it clear that three ideas underpin his thinking:

“First, the understanding of the world by far exceeds the Western understanding of the world. Second, there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice. Third, the emancipatory transformations in the world may follow grammars and scripts other than those developed by Western-centric critical theory, and such diversity should be valorized”¹⁹.

Santos, a decolonial sociologist already engaged in anti-globalisation movements²⁰, starts from two assumptions: the first is that, from the perspective of the excluded and the subaltern (also in terms of processes of racialisation and ethnicisation), the history of global capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy is characterised by “institutionalised and harmful lies”²¹; the second is that the “epistemologies of the North” – underpinned by a Western-centric reading of the principles of justice and universalism – are co-responsible in having fuelled a hegemonic narrative of relations between culturally differentiated social groups, legitimising the power relations between them. Even the so-called critical theories of Marxist inspiration – first and foremost the Frankfurt School – are said to have betrayed the expectations of social emancipation, due to their admixture of bourgeois attitudes – connoted we might add for being masculine, white and heterosexual – which are the object of its critique but which are, at the same time, fuelled by shared epistemological foundations “which suppress the cognitive dimension of social injustice and render Western understanding and transformation of the world universal”²². This is where for Santos, the need for an epistemological rupture comes in, a *condicio sine qua non* for giving a voice to the oppressed by recognising and overcoming the injustices that pervade their life stories.

The epistemologies of the South proposed by Santos differ from those of the North – mainly Eurocentric epistemologies – in being ‘poor theories’, rear-guard theories that rest on the experiences of large minorities and marginalised majorities struggling against unjustly imposed marginality and inferiority, with the aim of strengthening their capacity for resistance. Santos’ critical theorising is not Eurocentric insofar as it prepares the ground both for valorising non-Eurocentric conceptions of emancipation or liberation and for proposing counter-hegemonic interpretations and uses of Eurocentric concepts, such as those of human rights, the rule of law, democracy and socialism.

Epistemologies of the South are described by Santos as «...a set of inquiries into the construction and validation of knowledge born in struggle, of ways of knowing developed by social groups as part of their resistance against the systematic injustices and oppressions caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy»²³. Santos’ approach is decolonial, that is, aimed at highlighting the ‘abyssal lines’ drawn by the dominant abyssal thinking of our time through which both human and non-human realities on the other side of the line are rendered invisible or even actively constructed and produced as non-existent. This results in the most radical forms of social exclusion. The abyssal line is thus a boundary created in the colonial era that separates urban/metropolitan forms of sociability from colonial ones²⁴. The character of this boundary is imaginary, cognitive but also spatial and material²⁵; the abyssal line is a boundary that the social sciences and sociology in particular are unable to grasp. If the metropolitan form of sociability has substantiated the modern Western project – which has in the metaphor of the social contract its “atout”–, since the 16th century a second type of sociability has been determined: colonial sociability. This second type of sociability is governed by the tension between violence and appropriation (assimilation, co-optation, incorporation)²⁶. In colonial sociability, the excluded are not in a position to claim rights because they are not considered human. Their exclusion is abysmal. The abysmal thinking that Santos refers to corresponds in fact to Eurocentric rational thinking which, as such, does not recognise colonial sociability and what unfolds in the places and contexts characterised by this type of sociability.

A truly critical sociology – capable of creating the conditions of emancipatory thinking and generating factually emancipatory knowledge – must therefore “become post-abstract”: it must be able to illuminate the conditions of those who are excluded, marginalised, invisible, by examining them through new lenses. It is precisely invisibility that lies at the heart of the epistemology of blindness: an epistemology that obscures, that conceals. More than that, Santos advocates a sociology of absences ca-

pable of studying the way in which colonial domination relentlessly generates abysmal exclusion. The sociology of absences has the task of shedding light on the mechanisms of production and reproduction of the invisible subalterns, that is, of understanding how the invisibility of other sociabilities is achieved in the name of supposed epistemological superiorities. But to the sociology of absences, Santos also associates a sociology of emergences, the crucial component of the epistemologies of the South: here we value not only in political terms but also in scientific-analytical terms ways of being and ways of generating knowledge across the abyssal line. The thematisation of these two sociological 'strategies' makes it possible to show how 'the laziness of the dominant modern forms of reason leads to an enormous waste of social experiences that could otherwise be useful in identifying possibilities for emancipation'²⁷. It is interesting here to emphasise how for the sociologist, the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences open up the possibility of both ecologies of knowledge and intercultural translation; the latter is 'the alternative to both the abstract universalism that underpins general Western-centric theories and the idea of incommensurability between cultures'²⁸. The call is for a strategic alliance between South g/local, for intercultural translation between scholars/academics/researchers capable of questioning colonial assumptions that establish social hierarchies that research takes as given.

Santos, in making us aware of the way in which colonialism still conditions sociological perspectives and research practices today, at the same time invites us to decolonise them, an operation only possible if supported by reflexivity, by new, participatory forms of research, in which scholar and 'studied' are thought of as actors in the research relationship – a relationship of reciprocity – and in which the subject/object of the research then turns its gaze on the researcher²⁹.

3

When intercultural relations cross gender and class relations

The intertwining of research practices and social movements – which in the case of the emergence of Southern epistemologies is mainly in relation to the action of anti-colonial and other-worldly movements and, in the case of Du Bois, is substantiated in his civic and political commitment to the Afro-American movement – is also decisive in the case of a further 'point of view'³⁰ on intercultural relations; a point of view that is not limited to the ethnic and racial dimension but also invites us to look jointly at the dimensions of gender and class: Examples of this are the intersectional approach and that of postcolonial and decolonial feminisms. The contestation of the Eurocentric character of the social sciences, which is associated with the valorisation of shadow perspectives from 'colonised cultures' and 'peripheral regions'³¹, moves within the conceptual perimeter of 'race, ethnicity, hegemony, nation-state'. These are concepts that, as we have seen, have been placed under a very critical lens. The concept of gender, on the other hand, is a concept that was only later indicated as useful in denouncing this Eurocentric drift: it is to post-colonial and decolonial feminist scholars³² that the role of forerunner in this direction is attributed. Again, the intertwining of movement activism and feminist thought is also of benefit³³.

In what follows, we will briefly take up the intersectional, postcolonial, and decolonial feminist approaches in order to 'advance' our reflection on the questioning of hegemonic sociological perspectives – bourgeois, white, masculine. As we shall see, the 'third wave'³⁴ feminist movement is decisive in these approaches.

The term intersectionality – proposed by African American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw – emphasises the 'multidimensionality of the experiences of marginalised subjects'³⁵. This approach – which emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the context of critical race studies, which were committed to problematising the supposed neutrality and objectivity of law – was immediately interested in the particular

intersection of race and gender. To this end, intersectionality rejects the 'single-axis framework' in the practices of analysis, a framework often embraced by both feminist and anti-racist scholars, and instead focuses attention on the multiple ways in which race and gender interact to shape the different dimensions of black women's experiences³⁶. The intersectional approach sets itself scientific and political goals, thus not disentangling that partnership between theory and praxis that allowed movements, as early as the 1960s, to 'bring' gender into the academy. Even if it is precisely the 'colour' of this sodality that is now problematised here. The aim is first and foremost to subvert, in an unprecedented way, the race/gender binomial in the service of theorising about identity.

In fact, the approach was born in that season of the problematisation of identity politics: the politics of difference that also concerned the 'multicultural' plane, which was first implemented in the United States of America and Canada³⁷. The intention is to provide an alternative vocabulary to the reading that, for example, political philosophy, in its opposition between communitarians and liberals, makes of the multicultural question, remaining anchored in the equality/difference axis. Crenshaw argues instead that the real problem with identity politics is that it eludes difference between groups, a problem that intersectionality claims to solve by highlighting differences within the broad categories of 'women' and 'blacks'³⁸. Thus, intersectionality seeks to demonstrate racial variation within gender and gender variation within race³⁹. By setting itself this goal, it has also effectively reversed the march of the universalism of the 'feminist we', which would only have been sterilely opposed to the faux-universalism of the male-dominated 'we'.

The aspect of the intersectional approach that interests us most here is the invitation it makes to shift attention to subjects long excluded from feminist and anti-racist studies and the impact this exclusion has on both theory and practice⁴⁰. The intersectional approach responds to this essentialism by placing at the centre the experiences of subjects whose voices have been ignored, in light of the fact that placing them at the centre means doing so precisely because of the specificity of their voices. It is strategic and 'right' here, also in methodological terms, to 'draw on the views of marginalised subjects', to 'look down'⁴¹.

The latter is also the point of connection with post-colonial and decolonial feminisms, which both fit into and clarify post-colonial and decolonial studies. The focus of the postcolonial approach is on a 'history from below', i.e. the 'countercultural' reinterpretation of the colonial (and post-colonial) history of colonised places, highlighting the 'everyday forms of resistance' of subaltern subjects. It is precisely through and on the alternative, that feminist history is constructed; it is in the margins that the history of the 'silenced subaltern' that Spivak tells us about is woven⁴². Giving voice to the subaltern, however, also means questioning how subaltern thought and discourse, on the one hand, and feminist thought and discourse, on the other, come into contact: how can one narrate the 'oriental woman', the 'third-world woman', without speaking for her, without condemning her to an archetype (the docile wife or the vengeful goddess)? This question translates into a more upstream question: how to emancipate feminism from monolithic Eurocentric thinking? How to construct a feminism that can consider cultural specificities and understand identity as 'relational and historical'⁴³? As with the intersectional approach, postcolonial feminism has gone right to the heart of the hegemonic, ethnocentric, essentialising representation of Western academic discourses and their self-styled universalist agenda, including readings of Western feminism (the so-called second wave) that, intent on identifying the forms of patriarchal structures that oppress women as a whole, fall into the trap of identifying a 'main enemy' and a 'unique type of oppression'. But it is precisely this identification of a 'single enemy' that has had the consequence of blurring all the specificities (whether social, racial, cultural or sexual) of this oppression and, consequently, of negating all other cumulative forms of oppression⁴⁴. Hence the need to advocate a feminism that

was racially, socially and sexually aware, and that identified as its 'main enemy' the sum of systems of oppression in Western countries. A 'postcolonial feminism' – that is, a 'postcolonial-conscious' feminist discourse that derives from an articulation of gender, class/caste/ethnic group/race oppression, and also geographical and historical oppression as an extension of Orientalist discourses⁴⁵. The very heuristic category of gender therefore requires an operation of decolonisation⁴⁶.

The intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality as an integral element of the modern/colonial matrix of power, are indeed also the analytical focus of decolonial thought⁴⁷. Extending the arguments of both Anibal Quijano⁴⁸ (especially his concept of coloniality of power) and Walter D. Mignolo⁴⁹, decolonial feminist María Lugones tried to show how coloniality not only divides the world according to a particular racial logic, but also generates specific understandings of gender that enable the disappearance of the colonial/raced woman from theoretical and political consideration. To this aim, she proposed her central idea of coloniality of gender. She refuses to consider coloniality of gender as exclusively a circulation of power, which organizes the private sphere, and the access to and the control over sexuality. She focuses on the relationship between the conquering of nature and the transference of exploitation from the (European/white) man to nature and the colonizing invention of gender⁵⁰. Coloniality of gender is not merely a classification but it also indicates the process of dehumanizing people to fit them into this category. To oppose the coloniality of gender, Lugones introduces "decolonial feminism" as a kind of theory which frees subjugated knowledges⁵¹.

Conclusions

What lessons are we to draw in summary from this investigation which has highlighted the Eurocentric, hegemonic and discriminatory character of knowledge in the social sciences and the sociology of intercultural relations? And what horizons can we delineate in terms of commitment and responsibility towards democratising knowledge? I would like to emphasise two points.

The first lesson concerns the relationship between sociology, history and historiography⁵². The historical contextualisation of epistemologies and social research experiences is crucial: only by placing sociology historically, i.e. by locating its 'birth' and development within historical contexts, is it possible to deconstruct the theoretical, research and academic postures that as a 'universal we' we have adopted as canon. In fact, a 'sociological philology' must be able to explain why sociological thought has asserted itself in a specific direction and locate the reflections of male and female scholars in the historical contexts in which they lived. Their specific formulations are always situated, they could never have been made if they had not been developed in a specific historical period. Such an awareness – about the relevance of the intertwining of the study of the historical context in which a male or female scholar was formed and the concepts they put forward – is essential in problematising the fecundity of the analytical tools that we, as 'us universalists', adopt and illustrate in university classrooms such as analytical tools of sociology. Adopting a historical approach – capable of drawing on multiple historiographical sources – not least helps in the problematisation of a sociology of the singular and in the dissemination and support of a plural idea of the discipline that makes of interdisciplinary contamination its strong point, as my reflection sought to highlight.

A second, more distinctly methodological aspect is connected to this first point: how does one decolonise knowledge? If awareness of the ethical value of a plural knowledge – with multiple voices – is what moves many male and female scholars who study intercultural relations and the entanglements that come into play in the complexity of such relations (understanding culture not only in an ethnic and racial

sense but also in terms of gender, generation, status), how can we reverse the gear of research practice? The key concept here is that of reflexivity. Ahead of his time, Alberto Melucci in the late 1990s⁵³, looking at the effects of the so-called cultural turn in the social sciences, wrote that “a reflexive sociology experiments with research methods that in their application, often enthusiastic or unreflective, nevertheless question the fundamental assumptions of the positivist tradition in scientific enquiry”⁵⁴. He further emphasised that ‘research is a situated social practice and that words remain its raw material. In a world where knowledge features as part of our forms of life and shapes these forms while being, in turn, shaped by them, we can no longer be naïve about the use of words’⁵⁵. For reflexive sociology, language and the awareness of its non-neutrality is central, just as it is decisive to rethink the relationship between the observer and ‘his field’; two subject/objects now unthinkable if not in a relationship of reciprocal influence or even role reversal. Not least, reflexive sociology recognises the partiality of knowledge, assuming it both as a set of ‘plausible interpretations’ and as one form of narrative among many⁵⁶.

Advocating a reflexive sociology, however, entails constraints that we must also read as opportunities, especially as far as the topic of intercultural relations is concerned here today: reflexivity generates reflexivity in a potentially infinite vortex and the multiplicity of interpretations and paradigms can silence rather than give voice. Nevertheless, it is precisely in these risks and limits, that one can and must see the constructed character of research practices to which is linked a specific responsibility towards the production of knowledge and everyday intersubjective relations in differences⁵⁷.



Endnotes

1. Cf. E. SHILS, *The Sociology of Robert Park*, "The American Sociologist" 27 (1996) 4; A.D. MORRIS, *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*, University of California Press, Oakland, CA 2015.
2. Cf. W.E.B. DU BOIS, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Bantam Classic, New York, NY 1903.
3. Cf. M. WEBER, *Economia e società*, Donzelli, Roma 2022.
4. Cf. G.A. ABRAHAM, *Max Weber: Modernist Anti-Pluralism and the Polish Question*, "New German Critique" 53 (1991) 33-66; E. WINTER, *On Max Weber and Ethnicity in Times of Intellectual Decolonization*, "Cambio" 9 (2020) 20, 41-52.
5. In the famous Freiburg Prolusion of 1895, Weber speaks of "racial, physical and psychic qualities between the two nationalities in the processes of adaptation to economic and social living conditions"; he refers to "less developed races" and to German labourers who "subjugate themselves to a race inferior to them"; he also makes the "stomachs" of Polish workers an indicator of their social difference and cultural inferiority. On this theme see S. MEZZADRA, *La comunità dei nemici. Migranti, capitalismo e nazione negli scritti di Max Weber sui lavoratori agricoli nei territori prussiani a est dell'Elba (1892-1895)*, "Aut aut" 275 (1996) 18-42.
6. Cf. WINTER, *On Max Weber*.
7. Cf. *ivi*.
8. Cf. W.E.B. DU BOIS, *The Philadelphia Negro; A Social Study*, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA 1899.
9. Cf. MORRIS, *The Scholar Denied*.
10. Cf. DU BOIS, *The Souls of Black Folk*.
11. *Ibid.*, 2.
12. For this twofold commitment Burawoy pointed him out as "probably the best public sociologist of the XX century". Cf. M. BURAWOY, *2004 American Sociological Association Presidential Address: For Public Sociology*, "British Sociological Association" 56 (2005) 2, 259-94.
13. Cf. É. DURKHEIM, *Il suicidio. Studio di sociologia*, (Suicide: A Study in Sociology) Rizzoli, Milano, 1897.
14. Cf. MORRIS, *The Scholar Denied*.
15. It is important to point out here, also in view of the continuation of this reflection, that the nascent discipline of sociology did not only restrict its perimeter to non-Western/'white' thinkers, as in the emblematic case of Du Bois, but also exercised a form of 'scientific exclusion' towards women who had long not been counted among the founding sisters of sociology. See in this regard the work of sociologist M.J. DEEGAN, *Early Women Sociologists and the American Sociological Society: The Patterns of Exclusion and Participation*, "The American Sociologist" 16 (1981) 1, 14-24 and *Id.*, *Women in Sociology: A Bio-bibliographical Sourcebook*, Greenwood Press, New York, NY 1991.
16. Cf. MORRIS, *The Scholar Denied*.
17. Cf. *ibid.*, 141.
18. Cf. B. DE SOUSA SANTOS, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*, Paradigm Publishers, New York, NY 2014.

19. *Ibid.*, 8.
20. See also B. DE SOUSA SANTOS, *Another Knowledge is Possible*, Verso, London 2007.
21. *Ibid.*, 8.
22. *Ibid.*, 9.
23. *Ibid.*, 11.
24. Sociability is understood as the prevailing form of social relations that, anchored in specific socio-historical contexts, give rise to the geometries of social inclusion and exclusion.
25. G. RICOTTA, *Ripensare l'emancipazione sociale: sociologia delle assenze e delle emergenze*, "Quaderni di teoria sociale" 1 (2019) 179-198.
26. Cf. DE SOUSA SANTOS, *Epistemologies of the South*.
27. *Ibid.*, 11.
28. *Ibid.*, 11.
29. For an in-depth look at research practices in the light of De Sousa Santos' proposal, see V. PELLEGRINO – G. RICOTTA *Epistemologie dei Sud e decolonizzazione dell'immaginario sociologico*, in M. MASSARI – V. PELLEGRINO (eds.), *Emancipatory social science: le questioni, il dibattito, le pratiche*, Orthotes, Napoli 2020, 115-125.
30. See the work of Wylie, one of the proponents of the "standpoint theory". A. WYLIE, *Why Standpoint Matters*, in R. FIGUEROA – S.G. HARDING (eds.), *Science and Other Cultures: Issues in Philosophies of Science and Technology*, Routledge, London 2003, 26-48.
31. See, among others, the works of S.F. ALATAS, *Alternative Discourses in Asian Social Science: Responses to Eurocentrism*, Sage, New Delhi 2006; R. CONNELL, *Southern Theory: Social Science And The Global Dynamics Of Knowledge*, Polity, Unwin 2007; J. GO, *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory*, Oxford Scholarship on line (DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190625139.001.0001); W. KEIM, *Counter Hegemonic Currents and Internationalization of Sociology. Theoretical Reflections and One Empirical Example*, "International Sociology" 26 (2011) 1, 123-145.
32. See in particular C. MOHANTY, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship And Colonial Discourses*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC 1986; Id., *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC 2003; G. SPIVAK, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in L. CHRISMAN – P. WILLIAMS (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, Columbia University Press, New York, NY 1994, 66-111.
33. The lack of a thematisation of the possible contribution of a 'gendered reading' of intercultural relations, aimed at denouncing the Eurocentric character of knowledge, constitutes for Connell the main limitation of Santos' reflection. R. CONNELL, *Review of Epistemologies of the South*, "American Journal of Sociology" 120 (2014) 3, 949-951.
34. Of the four waves with which it is customary to distinguish the feminist movement, the third dates back to the 1980s and 1990s. This wave is characterised by an extension of women's subjectivities (in particular those of the so-called Global South, but also transgender women) and by the assertion of the intersectional perspective.
35. K. CRENSHAW, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*, University of Chicago Legal Forum, Chicago, IL 1989, 139.
36. Cf. Id., *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*, "Stanford Law Review" 43 (1991) 6, 1241-1299.
37. Cf. I. CAMOZZI, *Sociologia delle relazioni interculturali*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2019.
38. Cf. CRENSHAW, *Mapping the Margins*.

39. Crenshaw, as is well known, is concerned about re-interpretations of the approach in Europe; concerns that also arise in light of the specificity of European contexts and their influence on the conceptualisation of terms such as race, class, gender. Cf. G. KNAPP, *Race, Class, Gender: Reclaiming Baggage in Fast Travelling Theories*, "European Journal of Women's Studies" 12 (2005) 3, 249-265.
40. Cf. CRENSHAW, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*, 139.
41. Cf. M. MATSUDA, *Looking to the Bottom: Critical Legal Studies and Reparations*, "Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review" 22 (1987) 323-399.
42. Cf. SPIVAK, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*
43. *Ivi.*
44. Black feminism, for example, denounced the universalising elitism of such discourses, produced by and for the white, middle-class, heterosexual woman. Chandra Mohanty advocates a 'feminism without borders', which promotes both the decolonisation of feminism and the recognition of differences and thus borders. Cf. C. MOHANTY, *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC 1986; EAD., *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC 2003.
45. Cf. E. SAID, *Orientalism*, Penguin, London 1978.
46. On this issue see, among others, Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí's work on the processes of imposing gender differences through colonisation. 'Gender' as it is usually perceived today – i.e. in terms of male/female gender hierarchy and male domination/female subordination – is not as universal as it is believed to be. Colonialism imposed this way of conceptualising gender on the Yoruba, as well as on many other colonised populations, in Africa and elsewhere. See also María Lugones' work focused on understanding the indifference that men, who have been racialised as inferior, show to the systematic violence inflicted on 'black women'. Cf. O. OYẸWÙMÍ, *The Invention of Women: Making African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN 1997; EAD., *What Gender Is Motherhood? Changing Yorùbá Ideals of Power, Procreation, and Identity in the Age of Modernity*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire 2015; M. LUGONES, *The Coloniality of Gender*, "Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise" 2 (2008) 1-17.
47. While postcolonial studies limited their critical vein mainly to the cultural sphere, the modernity/coloniality approach was strongly linked to world-systems theory from the outset, to scholarly work in development and underdevelopment theory and the Frankfurt School critical social theory tradition. The modernity/coloniality school emerged from the work of, among others, the sociologists Anibal Quijano and María Lugones, and the philosopher and semiotician, Walter D. Mignolo. Cf. G. BHAMBRA, *Postcolonial and decolonial dialogues*, "Postcolonial Studies" 17 (2014) (2) 115-121.
48. Cf. A. QUIJANO, *Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality*, "Cultural Studies" 21 (2007) (2) 168-178.
49. Cf. W. MIGNOLO, *The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference*, "South Atlantic Quarterly" 101 (2000) (1) 57-96.
50. Cf. M. LUGONES, *The Coloniality of Gender*.
51. Cf. M. LUGONES, *Methodological Notes toward a Decolonial Feminism* in A. ISASI-DIAZ – EDUARDO MENDIETA (eds), *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy*, Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia (FUP), New York, NY 2011, 68-86.
52. It is well known that C. Wright Mills, back in the 1950s, invited the sociological community to conceive their research according to a historical purpose and to conduct it by drawing on historical material. Although this invitation has been taken up by many scholars thus promoting a 'historical sociology', its epistemological boundaries remain ill-defined. Cf. C. WRIGHT MILLS, *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford Press, New York, NY 1959.
53. Cf. A. MELUCCI, *Verso una sociologia riflessiva. Ricerca qualitativa e cultura*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1998.

54. *Ibid.*, 8.
55. *Ibid.*, 10.
56. Cf. *Ivi.*
57. As Marco Antonsich suggested with regard to the famous debate between Ted Cattle and Tariq Modood on the relationship between interculturalism and multiculturalism, the question we must ask ourselves today as researchers can no longer be 'how to live with diversity' but 'how to live in diversity'. A shift that is not only terminological but above all conceptual in that it embraces two ideas: the first is that 'minorities' will, in the near future, be majorities as a result of demographic processes; the second implies that the preposition *in* represents a tactical move to pave the way for an exploration of diversity. M. ANTONSICH, *Interculturalism Versus Multiculturalism – the Cattle-Modood Debate*, 'Ethnicities' 16 (2016) 3, 470-493.

Part Five

**APPENDICES
RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**



The Three Focus Groups

❖ Enrica Ottone – Luca Pandolfi

1

Presentation

The focus group is a discussion organized with a selected group of individuals in order to acquire opinions on an argument pertinent to the research; it is characterized by a certain interactivity among participants and it is also used to collect the opinion of the group, not only that of individual participants.

The conversation is animated by two figures with complementary functions:

a *facilitator* who proposes the activity and asks some key questions (pre-defined) that allow to explore and deepen the topic and plays the role of moderator;

an *observer* who has the task of assisting the facilitator, recording the meeting and noting the observed aspects.

In the action-research-training “*Multicultural and intercultural competences in ecclesiastical institution of higher education and in formation communities of consecrated life*” the focus group was proposed in a battery of 3 meetings and intended to provide a brief training itinerary designed as a guided self-analysis. The following sheet offers the general outline of each focus group.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Duration | about 2 hours for each focus group |
| Participants | between 8 and 15 people per group |
| Typology of groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – members of formation communities of consecrated life – university students (consecrated and lay) of the selected ecclesiastical academic institutions – teachers of the selected ecclesiastical academic institutions |
| Facilitators | 1 facilitator and 1 observer |
| Ways of conducting the meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The facilitator presents the focus group, introduces the topic, asks the questions, encourages the participation of all group members in the discussion, maintains a listening position and neutrality by avoiding expressing their own opinions and evaluations. – The participants initially express their opinion and/or experience on the proposed topic and only later interact with each other. – The observer is responsible for making a verbatim recording of the dialogues that will follow the initial presentation and he/she notes the order of speeches, issues pertaining to the conduct, dynamics, and climate in the group. |
| Outline of questions | <p><i>The outline for conducting the focus group contains 2 to 4 key questions: the first one is useful to get into the theme of the meeting, the following ones to deepen it.</i></p> <p><i>(Cf. The tracks for conducting focus group)</i></p> |
| Final report | The facilitator and observer transcribe the dialogues and draft a report containing the full transcript of the conversation with attached (but separate) comments and critical notes from both; and upload the files to the online platform within 15 days of the meeting taking place. <i>(Cf. Report form)</i> . |



2

Tracks for conducting the three focus groups

2.1 First Meeting: *Multiculturalism and interculturalism*

Purpose

To reveal, to 'measure' and to evaluate the opinions, knowledge and the positions of the participants about the two key concepts of the research, *multiculturalism* and *interculturalism*, and the difference between them.

Expected outcomes

The participants (and by extension, the institutions they belonged to), having explored the theme, become aware of their own opinions, knowledge and positions about the two key concepts of the research, multiculturalism and interculturalism, and the difference between them.

They also revealed some of the opportunities and problematics which emerge in a multicultural context

Activities

- After a brief presentation, the facilitator explains the purpose and modality of the meeting, introduces the topic and sets out the questions (5 mins).
- Before asking the first question, he/she specifies that the answers must refer only to the context of analysis that is the subject of the focus group, i.e. the university context or that of the formation community of consecrated life.
- Start a brainstorming session on point 1.1. below using two flipcharts (or whiteboard) on which to write down the emerging aspects: each person silently marks a word related to the two concepts (15 mins – remember to photograph and transcribe the two posters). Then ask each person to briefly add a few words or explanations on the difference between multiculturalism and interculturalism (45 mins).
- After the first round of interventions, he/she proposes the next question (1.2.) (20 mins); he/she then proposes the third question (1.3.) in the same way (20 mins).
- In the end, he/she says thank you, goodbye and reminds the date of the next appointment.

Questions

- 1.1 In your opinion, what is the difference between *multiculturalism* and *interculturalism*? Each one reflects, then we do a first round of interventions.
- 1.2 The context to which you belong (academic community or community of consecrated life) is a multicultural reality. When, and in what sense, is this an *opportunity*?
- 1.3 The context in which you live is a multicultural reality. When, and in what sense, is this a *problem*?

2.2 Second meeting: *Multiculturalism and education*

Purpose

To detect, to 'measure' and to evaluate the opinions, knowledge and the positions of the participants with regards to the relationship between multiculturalism and the learning path, both on a personal level and with regard to institutional training activity.

Expected outcomes

The participants (and by extension, the institutions they belonged to) became aware of their own opinions, knowledge and positions about multiculturalism as a more or less integral part of the formation process, both on a personal level as well as with regard to institutional training activity.

Activities

- After the greetings, the facilitator presents the purpose and modality of the meeting, recalls the previous meeting, asks the first question and invites participants to answer (30 mins). He/she specifies that the answers must refer only to the context of analysis that is the subject of the focus group, i.e. the university context or that of the formation community of consecrated life.
- After the first round of interventions, he/she proposes the next question (2.2.) and leaves time for interventions. (40 mins.).
- Then he/she proposes the third and fourth question (2.3. and 2.4.) in the same way (30 mins).
- In the end, he/she says thank you, goodbye and reminds the date of the next appointment.

Questions (for members of Institutes of Consecrated Life formative community)

- 2.1 In the multicultural formative context you belong to (community of consecrated life) you interact daily with people whose culture is different from yours. Talk about some examples of interaction and exchange that you live here with people from cultures different from yours.
- 2.2 Thinking about your educational experience in the context you belong to, what kind of proposals are made by the people who animate or manage this situation to promote multicultural interaction? Describe briefly.
- 2.3 How do you evaluate the proposals which have been listed? Express your evaluation.
- 2.4 If you could suggest other proposals, what would you indicate?

Questions (for the teachers)

- 2.1 In the multicultural educational context you belong to (academic community) you interact daily with people whose culture is different from yours. Talk about some examples of interaction and exchange that you live here with people from cultures different from yours.
- 2.2 We are in a multicultural educational context. How does this reality change your didactic provision (lesson content, language used in lessons, strategies and methodology, manuals and bibliographies required at examinations? (proposals)
- 2.3 How do you evaluate the proposals which have been listed? Express your evaluation.
- 2.4 If you could suggest other proposals, what would you indicate?

Questions (for the students)

- 2.1 In the multicultural educational context you belong to (academic community) you interact daily with people whose culture is different from yours. Talk about some examples of interaction and exchange that you live here with people from cultures different from yours.

- 2.2 We are in a multicultural educational context. How does this reality change the didactic provision by the university (lesson content, language used in lessons, strategies and methodology, manuals and bibliographies required at examinations)? (proposals)
- 2.3 How do you evaluate the proposals which have been listed? Express your evaluation.
- 2.4 If you could suggest other proposals, what would you indicate?

2.3 Third meeting: Intercultural competences in multicultural education and formation communities

The third focus group is activated only for members of the formation communities of consecrated life and for their students

Purpose

To reveal, to “measure” and to evaluate the opinions and the positions of the participants about the competences they considered useful in order to live and learn in multicultural formative contexts.

Expected outcomes

The participants and by extension, the institutions they belonged to, became aware of their own opinions, knowledge and positions about the competences they considered useful in order to live and learn in multicultural formative contexts.

Activities

- After the greetings, the facilitator presents the purpose and modality of the meeting and initiates a short brainstorming session on point 3.1. below using a poster on which participants place their individual post-it notes (15 mins.).
- Once everyone has spoken, propose the second activity (3.2), deliver and present the activity sheet: *The competences that are useful in multicultural education and formation contexts* (90 mins).
- Before concluding, collect the activity sheets and present and hand out to the participants the optional online activity. (See: *Tool for the narration of critical incidents*) (10 mins.)

Questions

- 3.1 What are the problems (or challenging situations) you meet up with in a multicultural formative community? In a note on a post-it, write down a problem you encounter with reference to the multicultural formative context to which you belong.
- 3.2 Starting from the problems mentioned and your own experience in multicultural formative contexts, in your opinion what are the competences required today in order to react efficaciously and appropriately when you are in a relationship with people who have a language and a culture different from yours? Each one of you, describe the three aspects you consider to be the most useful on the form provided.

Activity Sheet: The competences that are useful in multicultural training contexts

Purpose

Identify the aspects (beliefs, skills, attitudes, values) that you consider useful for living in a multicultural educational context

Activity

The activity takes place in 3 moments, the first 2 are individual and the last one takes place in a group.

- a. Select 10 aspects you consider most useful for living in a multicultural educational context. Circle the numbers that relate to the chosen aspects. You can add other aspects to the list below, but the total of those chosen must be 10 (10 mins.).

| | | |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| 1. Caring for the other | 2. Decentralising | 3. Respecting privacy |
| 4. Knowing how to communicate appropriately and effectively | 5. Respect for freedom | 6. Compliance and respect for social norms |
| 7. Knowing historical, political, religious contexts | 8. Understanding meanings | 9. Understanding the other's point of view |
| 10. Respect human rights | 11. Knowing how to observe | 12. Flexibility |
| 13. Help other people | 14. Trusting the other | 15. Knowing how to interpret |
| 16. Suspending judgement | 17. Tolerance | 18. Respecting others |
| 19. Welcoming | 20. Resilience | 21. Empathy |
| 22. Personal development | 23. Loyalty | 24. Critical thinking |
| 25. Finding shared horizons | 26. Reflection | 27. Self-respect |
| 28. Breaking free from ethnocentrism | 29. Democracy | 30. Self-esteem |
| 31. Awareness that culture is dynamic and plural | 32. Knowing the language | 33. Reducing stereotypes and prejudices |
| 34. Managing conflicts | 35. Wisdom | 36. Respect for diversity |
| 37. Knowing how to collaborate | 38. Patience | 39. Kindness |
| 40. Knowledge of one's own culture | 41. Dialogue | 42. Curiosity for the other |
| 43. Willingness to talk about oneself | 44. Mediation | 45. Truthfulness |
| 46. Independence and autonomy of thought | 47. Listening | 48. Humour |
| 49. (Other): ... | 50. (Other): ... | 51. (Other): ... |

- b. Now imagine that you could only keep 3 of the 10 aspects you chose. Write on the line below the number that refers to the 3 aspects you chose (5 minutes)

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

- c. Join 3-5 people in a group and explain why you chose them (5 minutes).

About you: male female | _____ age | _____ country of origin

3

Annexes

3.1

Information sheets

The observer fills out the following form in which he/she collects some information on the meeting, the participants, and how and when the focus group (FG) was actually held.

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| FG number | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | | | | | |
| Group Type | <input type="checkbox"/> consecrated life community | | <input type="checkbox"/> university students | | <input type="checkbox"/> teachers | |
| FG date and time | | Start time: | | End time: | | |
| FG location | | | | | | |
| Facilitator | Surname and Name | | | | | |
| Observer | Surname and Name | | | | | |
| List of FG participants | Surname and Name | Initials | Age | Sex | Nationality | Role |
| | 1. | | | | | |
| | 2. | | | | | |
| | 3. | | | | | |
| | 4. | | | | | |
| | 5. | | | | | |
| | 6. | | | | | |
| | 7. | | | | | |
| | 8. | | | | | |
| | 9. | | | | | |
| | 10. | | | | | |
| | 11. | | | | | |
| | 12. | | | | | |
| | 13. | | | | | |
| | 14. | | | | | |
| | 15. | | | | | |
| Modes of the FG conduct | Phase: | Player: | | Time: | Note: | |
| | | Greetings, thanks, brief presentation of the purpose of the meeting and of the host and observer, by the organisation's contact person | | Contact person of the Institution 5 mins. | | |
| | | Clarify the objective of the meeting, the subject of the investigation, how to participate, the timing, the logistical aspects and provide a definition of the object of investigation | | Facilitator 5 mins. | | |
| | | Starting stimulus questions and collecting answers | | Facilitator and participants 90 mins. | | |
| | | Acknowledgments and information on the communication of focus group outcomes and greetings | | Facilitator 5 mins. | | |
| | Other (specify): | | | | | |
| Annexes | Annex A. Transcription of the dialogues (e.g. Dom. 1: Respondent acronym: "Response Intervention") Annex B. Critical notes and comments by the facilitator and observer | | | | | |

3.2 Form for the transcription of the dialogues

Annex A contains the form for the transcription of the dialogues held during the focus group.

| | | | |
|-------------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| FG number | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| Group Type | <input type="checkbox"/> consecrated life community | <input type="checkbox"/> university students | <input type="checkbox"/> teachers |
| FG date and time | | Start time: | End time: |
| FG location | | | |
| Facilitator | | | |
| Observer | | | |

Complete the text of the dialogues without any formatting (no bold, italics, paragraphs) in the boxes below keeping in mind the following:

- On the **Question** line: Write the words the facilitator used to ask the question (without creating paragraphs or pressing enter)
- On the **Response** line: Write what the participants shared omitting any eventual statements by the facilitator; do not indicate the number of the respondent (as is required in Appendix D, it is not necessary to identify the respondent).

It will be the secretariat's task afterwards to clean up the text and insert the analysis keys.

| | |
|---|--|
| Question 1.1 <i>(facilitator)</i> | |
| Answers 1.1 <i>(participants)</i> | |
| Question 1.2 <i>(facilitator)</i> | |
| Answers 1.2 <i>(participants)</i> | |
| Question 1.3 <i>(facilitator)</i> | |
| Answers 1.3 <i>(participants)</i> | |

3.3 Form for critical notes and comments

Annex B contains the notes and comments by the facilitator and observer.

| | | | |
|-------------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| FG number | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 |
| Group Type | <input type="checkbox"/> consecrated life community | <input type="checkbox"/> university students | <input type="checkbox"/> teachers |
| FG date and time | | Start time: | End time: |
| FG location | | | |
| Facilitator | | | |
| Observer | | | |

Critical notes and comments

Indicate in the box below the observations that are shared by both animators (facilitator and observer) and possibly (specifying) those perceived only by one of the two observers but not shared by the other

3.4 Brainstorming transcription (focus group n. 1)

Annex C contains the transcription of the individual words written in the brainstorming at the beginning of the first focus group on the concepts of *Multiculturality* and *Interculturality*.

Multiculturality

In the box below write the list of words

Interculturality

In the box below write the list of words

3.5 Form for the full transcript of the recorded

Annex D contains the full transcript of the recording with an indication of the number of participants. From this text, the parts for the compilation of Annex A should be extracted. Indicate the speeches with the No. assigned to the respective persons. The "Fc" will indicate the "Facilitator".





Tool for the Narration of Critical Incidents

❖ Enrica Ottone



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Purpose of the activity

Describe the resources and competences deployed in a challenging and/or problematic incident experienced when interacting with people from a culture different from one's own in your own life context (university environment, work context, consecrated life community).

Methodology

The activity uses the methodology of practice storytelling. Initially, the participants are asked to narrate in written form and in detail an incident experienced in a multicultural context; subsequently, they are asked to reflect on the intercultural competences implemented to deal with the situation described, i.e. thoughts, emotions, actions implemented in the interaction with one or more people belonging to a culture different from your own.

Stages, timing, and procedure

| TIMING | ACTIVITIES |
|--|--|
| First Stage: Narrate a challenging event or situation | |
| 30 minutes* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify in your life experience in the multicultural educational context in which you are embedded (living community or university environment) a single incident you experienced as challenging that relates to the interaction between you and one or more members belonging to a culture different from your own. Once chosen, please describe it in detail using the attached form. Once finished, kindly send your story by e-mail. |
| Second Stage: Reread and enrich your story | |
| 15 minutes* | <p><i>If necessary,</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on the reply you will receive by email – in the light of the comments and any follow-up questions sent to you – revise your narrative, enriching it with details, to make it clearer and more comprehensive. Once finished, kindly send your narrative by email. |
| Third stage: Analyse intercultural competence | |
| 15 minutes* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reread the final version of your narrative, identify one or more skills you implemented in the challenging and/or problematic situation you narrated and write them in the space provided. Describe the resources you activated, i.e. the knowledge, skills and internal dispositions (attitudes, values) you put into action in the situation. Afterwards, if you wish, you may also fill in the section 'Any remarks'. Finally, assign an evocative title to the narrated event, which is representative of the listed competence(s). Once finished, kindly send your narrative by email. |
| Fourth Stage: Submit final version | |
| 15 minutes* | <p><i>If necessary,</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in the light of the comments and suggestions provided to you by email, revise your 'Form', draft the final version and kindly send it by email. |

* The requested work must be completed no later than 1 week from the date of receipt of the reply email. The time indicated in the first column is only an indication.

Sheet to be completed in two or more stages

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A CHALLENGING INCIDENT OR PROBLEMATIC EVENT YOU EXPERIENCED IN A MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT</p> <p><i>Describe the situation in detail, dwell on concrete details and avoid generalisations; describe the context in which the incident took place and explain how it happened; dwell on each stage; describe your experience and possible interpretations of the event (yours and those of the people involved).</i></p> | <p>First stage <i>The following questions can help you clarify and describe the situation:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When and in what context did the episode occur? <i>Please describe briefly.</i> • Who are the persons involved? <i>Describe the protagonists, clarify their role and, if necessary, state whether other people witnessed the event.</i> • What happened? <i>Describe the event by detailing what happened at the beginning, during and afterwards.</i> • What did you think? What did you feel? How did you behave? • <i>Tell your thoughts, your emotions, what you said and/or did.</i> • What meaning do you attribute to the event? <i>Please explain what the event meant to you.</i> • In your opinion, what significance did people from a different culture than yours attach to the event? <i>Imagine how he/she experienced the event (what he/she thought and felt) and describe his/her interpretation of the event.</i> |
| <p>TITLE OF THE EVENT <i>(you can assign it at the end of the activity)</i></p> | <p>Second stage <i>Write a title, i.e. a concise and effective expression to summarise your narrative.</i></p> |
| <p>CONTEXT, PERIOD</p> | <p><i>Indicate the context and period in which the incident occurred (e.g. community of life, or university or work environment...).</i></p> |
| <p>COMPETENCE <i>taken into consideration</i></p> | <p>Third and fourth stages <i>Write down the main competence you implemented (e.g.: I was able to decentralise, or I understood the other person's point of view, or I was able to recognise my own prejudices...).</i></p> |
| <p>RESOURCES YOU ACTIVATED IN THE SITUATION</p> | |
| <p>Knowledge</p> | <p><i>Ask the tutor to send you some examples if you need help filling in this line and those below.</i></p> |
| <p>Skills</p> | |
| <p>Internal Provisions <i>(values, attitudes)</i></p> | |
| <p>ANY COMMENTS</p> | |

* The module was designed by Enrica Ottone based on the model of the tool used in the research conducted by the team at the Catholic University of Milan through the Research Centre on Intercultural Relations. Cf. P. REGGIO, *La ricerca sulle competenze interculturali di insegnanti ed educatori*, in Id. – SANTERINI (eds.), *Le competenze*, 60.





Questionnaire on Intercultural Competences in Formative Settings

❖ Luca Di Censi – Luca Pandolfi



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This survey focuses on the experience of living in Italy as a student in the context of a multicultural university and/or as a member of a multicultural community of consecrated life. Your answers remain confidential and will not be shared with others. There are 62 questions in this survey.

1. You are... *

Choose one of the following answers

- Male
- Female

2. Indicate your age bracket *

Choose one of the following answers

- 18-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61+

3. Indicate the title of the highest educational level you attained *

Choose one of the following answers

- Primary (Elementary) School Diploma
- Lower secondary Education (Middle) School Diploma
- Vocational School Diploma
- Technical or Commercial School Diploma
- Upper Secondary (Senior High) School Diploma
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree / Licenciate
- PhD / Doctoral Degree
- Other

4. You are... *

Choose one of the following answers

- A diocesan priest
- A seminarian
- A Man/Woman consecrated
- A Man/Woman lay person

5. Indicate the macro-geographical region of your birthplace *

Choose one of the following answers

- Italy
- USA and Canada
- Latin America and Caribbean

- Northern Europe
- Western Europe and Southern Europe
- Eastern Europe
- North Africa
- Sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa
- West Asia (Middle East)
- Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, etc.)
- South Asia (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, etc.)
- East Asia (China, Mongolia, North and South Korea, Taiwan, Japan)
- Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, etc.)
- Oceania

6. Before arriving in Italy, did you live in other countries? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was NOT 'Italy' at question '5 [Q00005]' (Indicate the macro-geographical region of your birthplace)

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes, in only one country
- Yes, in more than one country
- No

7. How long have you been in Italy? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was NOT 'Italy' at question '5 [Q00005]' (Indicate the macro-geographical region of your birthplace)

Please choose only one of the following:

- Less than a year
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5-6 years
- More than 6 years

8. Which of the following reasons explains your arrival in Italy? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was NOT 'A Man/Woman lay person' at question '4 [Q00004]' (You are...)

Answer was NOT 'Italy' at question '5 [Q00005]' (Indicate the macro-geographical region of your birthplace)

Choose one of the following answers

- I came to Italy before choosing consecrated life or priestly formation.
- I chose consecrated life or priestly formation outside Italy, then I was sent to Italy to complete my formation
- I moved to my congregation in Italy from another congregation outside of Italy.
- Other

9 When you arrived in Italy, did you have difficulty adjusting? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was NOT 'Italy' at question '5 [Q00005]' (Indicate the macro-geographical region of your birthplace)

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

10. What were the main difficulties?

*Choose one or more of the following **

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was NOT 'Italy' at question '5 [Q00005]' (Indicate the macro-geographical region of your birthplace) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '9 [Q00009]' (When you arrived in Italy, did you have difficulty adjusting?)

Please choose all that apply:

- Difficulty in communication due to poor knowledge of the Italian language
- Difficulty in studies due to poor knowledge of the Italian language
- Difficulty getting used to different eating habits (food, meal times, etc.).
- Difficulties due to cultural differences in the way people relate to each other (closeness, gestures, etc.).
- Ethnic bias against me
- Racist behavior towards me
- Difficulties in getting public assistance (health/social services)
- Difficulties in entering the school/university system
- Other

11. Who helped you in your difficulties?

*Choose one or more of the following **

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was NOT 'Italy' at question '5 [Q00005]' (Indicate the macro-geographical region of your birthplace) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '9 [Q00009]' (When you arrived in Italy, did you have difficulty adjusting?)

Please choose all that apply:

- I overcame the difficulties alone.
- I was helped by friends.
- I was helped by members of my congregation or by the formation program.
- I was helped by government officials.
- I was helped by people from my own country.
- Other

12. With whom are you living now? *

Choose one of the following answers

- I live alone
- I live with my family
- I live with other people (in a community, apartment or other)
- Other

13. Where do you live now? *

Choose one of the following answers

- In the seminary
- In a community of consecrated life with the sisters/brothers of my congregation
- In a community of consecrated life with the sisters/brothers of another congregation
- In an inter-congregational community of consecrated life
- In uno Studentato
- In an apartment
- Other

14. Are you now studying at the university? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

15. Which university are you going to? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Choose one of the following answers

If you choose 'Other:' please also specify your choice in the accompanying text field.

- Pontifical Antonianum University
- Pontifical Gregorian University
- Pontifical Lateran University
- Pontifical Salesian University
- Pontifical University of the Holy Cross
- Pontifical Urbaniana University
- Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas Angelicum
- Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences Auxilium
- Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum
- Pontifical Athenaeum Saint Anselm
- Pontifical Theological Faculty Teresianum
- Pontifical Theological Faculty St. Bonaventure Seraphicum
- Pontifical Theological Faculty Marianum"
- Theological Faculty of Sicily
- Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions – P.I.M.E.
- Institute of Theology of Consecrated Life Claretianum
- Sophia University Institute
- Other Pontifical University or Pontifical University Institute
- Other State University
- Other

16. In what year of study are you enrolled? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Please choose only one of the following:

- First year of the Bachelor's Degree
- Second year of the Bachelor's Degree
- Third year of the Bachelor's Degree
- First year of the Master's Degree / Licenciante
- Second year of the Master's Degree / Licenciante
- Doctoral studies
- Other Courses
- Other

17. In your university, how many students came from countries other than Italy? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

- Choose one of the following answers*
- Majority of them
- More than half of them
- Half of them
- Less than half of them
- A minority
- I don't know

18. Identify the main geographical macro-areas from which the students come

Choose one or more of the following

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Please choose all that apply:

- Italy
- USA and Canada
- Latin America and Caribbean
- Northern Europe
- Western Europe and Southern Europe
- Eastern Europe
- North Africa
- Sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa
- West Asia (Middle East)
- Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, etc.)
- South Asia (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, etc.)
- East Asia (China, Mongolia, North and South Korea, Taiwan, Japan)
- Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, etc.)
- Oceania

19. Is the information concerning the university's organisation (website, lecture schedule, notices, forms and administrative procedures, etc.) written in multiple languages? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Choose one of the following answers

- Yes, in at least two languages
- Yes, in more than two languages
- No, only in Italian

20. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 represents the minimum and 10 the maximum level, how would you define the relationship among people of different nationalities in the university you go to?

Answer per line *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| Cooperative | | | | | | | | | | |
| Friendly | | | | | | | | | | |
| Conflictual | | | | | | | | | | |
| Intolerant towards diversity | | | | | | | | | | |
| Respectful | | | | | | | | | | |

21. Your university context is multicultural. In your opinion this is an opportunity because:

Choose one or more of the following *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Please choose all that apply:

- It gives the chance to get to know other cultures
- It enables people to transform their cultural approach, by enriching it

- It helps people understand the limits of their own cultural approach
- It teaches how to live with different people
- It opens up one's horizons on understanding the world
- It promotes the learning of new languages
- Other

22. Your university context is multicultural. In your opinion this is a problem because:

Choose one or more of the following

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Please choose all that apply:

- It requires effort to adapt to differences
- It leads to some confusion in the learning activity
- The different ways of doing and thinking can make living together uncomfortable
- The different languages do not facilitate deep communication
- Closed groups are formed by people of the same nationality
- There is a risk of changing one's cultural identity
- Other

23. In your university environment, did you ever have problems with people of a different nationality? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

24. Could you identify the type of problem you encountered in your university environment?

Choose one or more of the following

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

and Answer was 'Yes' at question '23 [Q00023]' (In your university environment, did you ever have problems with people of a different nationality?)

Please choose all that apply:

- Being excluded from learning activities
- Ethnic bias against me
- Being isolated from relationships
- Episodes of racism
- Other

25. The problems you refer to were caused by: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

and Answer was 'Yes' at question '23 [Q00023]' (In your university environment, did you ever have problems with people of a different nationality?)

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- an individual person
- a group of people

26. From which macro-area is the person(s) you had problems with?

*Choose one or more of the following **

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

*Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)
and Answer was 'Yes' at question '23 [Q00023]' (In your university environment, did you ever have problems with people of a different nationality?)*

Please choose all that apply:

- Italy
- USA and Canada
- Latin America and Caribbean
- Northern Europe
- Western Europe and Southern Europe
- Eastern Europe
- North Africa
- Sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa
- West Asia (Middle East)
- Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, etc.)
- South Asia (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, etc.)
- East Asia (China, Mongolia, North and South Korea, Taiwan, Japan)
- Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, etc.)
- Oceania

27. How did you deal with the problems?

*Choose one or more of the following **

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

*Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)
and Answer was 'Yes' at question '23 [Q00023]' (In your university environment, did you ever have problems with people of a different nationality?)*

Please choose all that apply:

- I spoke with a university director
- I spoke to the person(s) concerned for clarification.
- I tried to understand the reasons for such behavior.
- I ignored the incident
- Other

28. In your university curriculum the lessons are conducted: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- only in Italian
- in Italian and other languages
- only in another language

29. The professors of the courses/workshops you have attended adopt: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- only European texts
- mostly European texts with a small portion of texts from other continents
- both texts from Europe and other continents, in equal parts
- mostly texts from other continents with a small portion of European texts
- only texts belonging to a non-European source

30. In your university course of study in Italy, did you find differences with the teaching model of your country? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- I have always studied in Italy
- Yes, very different
- Yes, partly different
- No, very similar

31. Are the concepts you are learning in your course of study useful in your country of origin? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

and Answer was NOT 'I have always studied in Italy ' at question '30 [Q00030]' (In your university course of study in Italy, did you find differences with the teaching model of your country?)

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

32. Is the teaching model you are experiencing in Italy (lessons, testing methods and homework) applicable in your country of origin? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

and Answer was NOT 'I have always studied in Italy ' at question '30 [Q00030]' (In your university course of study in Italy, did you find differences with the teaching model of your country?)

Choose one of the following answers

- Yes
- Yes, only partly
- No

33. INTERCULTURALITY IS THE SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATIVE EXPERIENCE THAT ONE CAN HAVE WHEN MEETING PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC BACKGROUNDS.

In your opinion, which definition best expresses the experience of interculturality that should be lived in a university context? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Choose one of the following answers

- Interculturality implies acceptance and respect for the different, without changing one's cultural identity, even in the daily search for dialogue, understanding and collaboration.
- Interculturality means not only the acceptance and respect for what is different, but also an exchange that can lead to a change in some aspects of cultural identity in the daily search for dialogue, understanding, collaboration, in a perspective of mutual enrichment.

34. Bearing in mind the definition of interculturality you chose in the previous question, how do you rate your university context? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Choose one of the following answers

- Truly intercultural
- Sufficiently intercultural
- Little interculturality
- Not at all intercultural

35. In your university context what kind of suggestions are made by the leaders to foster intercultural dynamics?

*Choose one or more of the following **

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Please choose all that apply:

- Workshops on conflict management in contexts of cultural plurality
- Paths for the management of culture shock (cultural stress, uneasiness for the prolonged stay in a cultural context different from one's own)
- Presentation of customs and traditions from different cultural backgrounds
- Courses and seminars focused on the knowledge of different forms of culture
- Courses on the local language (Italian)
- Courses on the non-European languages (Chinese, Arabic, African languages, Native American languages, etc.).
- Study and work groups with people of different nationalities
- Workshops to learn about different cultures
- Workshops and tours to get to know the local culture (Italian)
- Activities on the local territory to promote the different cultures present in the formation context
- Lessons given in multiple languages
- Use of textbooks from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds for courses and seminars

36. In your opinion, which of the following suggestions can facilitate intercultural dynamics in the university context?

*Give at most 3 answers **

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '14 [Q00014]' (Are you now studying at the university?)

Please select from 1 to 3 answers.

- Workshops on conflict management in contexts of cultural plurality
- Paths for the management of culture shock (cultural stress, uneasiness for the prolonged stay in a cultural context different from one's own)
- Presentation of customs and traditions from different cultural backgrounds
- Courses and seminars focused on the knowledge of different forms of culture
- Courses on the local language (Italian)
- Courses on the non-European languages (Chinese, Arabic, African languages, Native American languages, etc.).
- Study and work groups with people of different nationalities
- Workshops to learn about different cultures
- Workshops and tours to get to know the local culture (Italian)
- Activities on the local territory to promote the different cultures present in the formation context
- Lessons given in multiple languages
- Use of textbooks from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds for courses and seminars

37. Do you now live in a community of consecrated life? *

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes
- No

38. Indicate the geographical macro-area of the country where your congregation was founded *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Choose one of the following answers

- Italy
- USA and Canada
- Latin America and Caribbean
- Northern Europe
- Western Europe and Southern Europe
- Eastern Europe
- North Africa
- Sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa
- West Asia (Middle East)
- Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, etc.)
- South Asia (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, etc.)
- East Asia (China, Mongolia, North and South Korea, Taiwan, Japan)
- Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, etc.)
- Oceania

39. Before living in this community of consecrated life, did you have other experiences of living with people of nationalities other than your own? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Choose one of the following answers

- Yes
- No

40. How many people in your community of consecrated life are from countries other than your own? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Choose one of the following answers

- Majority of them
- More than half of them
- Half of them
- Less than half of them
- A minority
- I don't know

41. Indicate the main geographical macro-areas from which the members of your community come. Choose one or more of the following *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Please choose all that apply:

- Italy
- USA and Canada
- Latin America and Caribbean
- Northern Europe
- Western Europe and Southern Europe
- Eastern Europe
- North Africa
- Sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa
- West Asia (Middle East)
- Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, etc.)
- South Asia (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, etc.)
- East Asia (China, Mongolia, North and South Korea, Taiwan, Japan)
- Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, etc.)
- Oceania

42. On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 represents the minimum and 10 the maximum level, how would you describe the state of relationships between people of different nationalities in your community of consecrated life?

*Answer per line **

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| Cooperative | | | | | | | | | | |
| Friendly | | | | | | | | | | |
| Conflictual | | | | | | | | | | |
| Intolerant towards diversity | | | | | | | | | | |
| Respectful | | | | | | | | | | |

43 Your community of consecrated life is multicultural. In your opinion this is an opportunity because:

*Choose one or more of the following **

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Please choose all that apply:

- It gives the chance to get to know other cultures
- It enables people to transform their cultural approach, by enriching it
- It helps people understand the limits of their own cultural approach
- It teaches how to live with different people
- It opens up one's horizons on understanding the world
- It promotes the learning of new languages
- Other

44. Your community of consecrated life is multicultural. In your opinion this is a problem because:

*Choose one or more of the following **

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Please choose all that apply:

- It requires effort to adapt to differences
- It leads to some confusion in the formative activity
- The different ways of doing and thinking can make living together uncomfortable
- The different languages do not facilitate deep communication
- Closed groups are formed by people of the same nationality
- There is a risk of changing one's cultural identity
- Other

45. In your community of consecrated life are communications written in multiple languages? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Choose one of the following answers

- Yes, in at least two languages
- Yes, in more than two languages
- No, only in Italian

46. In the community of consecrated life you belong to, did you ever have problems with people of nationalities other than your own? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Choose one of the following answers

- Yes
- No

47. Could you indicate the type of problem you faced?

*Choose one or more of the following **

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '46 [Q00046]' (In the community of consecrated life you belong to, did you ever have problems with people of nationalities other than your own?)

Please choose all that apply:

- Being excluded from formative activities
- Ethnic bias against me
- Being isolated from relationships
- Episodes of racism
- Other

48. The problems you refer to were caused by: *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '46 [Q00046]' (In the community of consecrated life you belong to, did you ever have problems with people of nationalities other than your own?)

Choose one of the following answers

- an individual person
- a group of people

49. From which macro-area is the person(s) you had problems with?

*Choose one or more of the following **

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '46 [Q00046]' (In the community of consecrated life you belong to, did you ever have problems with people of nationalities other than your own?)

Please choose all that apply:

- Italy
- USA and Canada
- Latin America and Caribbean
- Northern Europe
- Western Europe and Southern Europe
- Eastern Europe
- North Africa
- Sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa
- West Asia (Middle East)
- Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, etc.)
- South Asia (India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, etc.)
- East Asia (China, Mongolia, North and South Korea, Taiwan, Japan)
- Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, etc.)
- Oceania

50. How did you deal with the problems?

*Choose one or more of the following **

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?) and Answer was 'Yes' at question '46 [Q00046]' (In the community of consecrated life you belong to, did you ever have problems with people of nationalities other than your own?)

Please choose all that apply:

- I spoke with my superior.
- I spoke to the person(s) concerned for clarification.
- I tried to understand the reasons for such behavior.
- I ignored the incident
- Other

51. In your religious formation in Italy, did you find differences from your home country's formation model? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- I don't know, I was formed in Italy
- Yes, very different
- Yes, partly different
- No, very similar

52. The prevailing model of community life in your congregation (organization of the community, schedules, food, tasks, use of common spaces, etc.) is *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Choose one of the following answers

- Only European
- Preferably European with a small part from other cultural backgrounds
- Plural and sensitive to models of several cultural backgrounds
- Preferably from different cultural backgrounds with a small part of European background
- Only of backgrounds different from the European one

53. The prevailing model of spirituality in your community (lifestyle, apostolate, prayer, formation, readings, etc.) is *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- Only European
- Preferably European with a small part from other cultural backgrounds
- Plural and sensitive to models of several cultural backgrounds
- Preferably from different cultural backgrounds with a small part of European background
- Only of backgrounds different from the European one

54. INTERCULTURALITY IS THE SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATIVE EXPERIENCE THAT ONE CAN HAVE WHEN MEETING PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC BACKGROUNDS.

In your opinion, which definition best expresses the experience of interculturality that should be lived in a formative community of consecrated life? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- Interculturality implies acceptance and respect for the different, without changing one's cultural identity, even in the daily search for dialogue, understanding and collaboration.
- Interculturality means not only the acceptance and respect for what is different, but also an exchange that can lead to a change in some aspects of cultural identity in the daily search for dialogue, understanding, collaboration, in a perspective of mutual enrichment.

55. Considering the definition of interculturality that you chose in the previous question, how would you rate the formative community of consecrated life in which you live? *

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- Truly intercultural
- Quite intercultural
- Not very intercultural
- Not intercultural at all

56. In your community of consecrated life, what kind of suggestions are made by the leaders to facilitate intercultural dynamics?

*Choose one or more of the following **

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Please choose all that apply:

- Workshops on conflict management in contexts of cultural plurality
- Paths for the management of culture shock (cultural stress, uneasiness for the prolonged stay in a cultural context different from one's own)
- Presentation of customs and traditions from different cultural backgrounds
- Courses on the local language (Italian)
- Courses on the non-European languages (Chinese, Arabic, African languages, Native American languages, etc.)
- Activities on the local territory to promote the different cultures present in the formation context
- Multilingual meetings
- Use of formative materials in multiple languages

57. In your opinion, which of the following suggestions can facilitate intercultural dynamics in your community of consecrated life?

*Give at most 3 answers **

Only answer this question if the following conditions are met:

Answer was 'Yes' at question '37 [Q00037]' (Do you now live in a community of consecrated life?)

Please select from 1 to 3 answers.

Please choose all that apply:

- Workshops on conflict management in contexts of cultural plurality
- Paths for the management of culture shock (cultural stress, uneasiness for the prolonged stay in a cultural context different from one's own)
- Presentation of customs and traditions from different cultural backgrounds
- Courses on the local language (Italian)
- Courses on the non-European languages (Chinese, Arabic, African languages, Native American languages, etc.)
- Activities on the local territory to promote the different cultures present in the formation context
- Multilingual meetings
- Use of formative materials in multiple languages

58. Do you think people from different cultures can live together? *

Choose one of the following answers

Please choose only one of the following:

- Yes, because we live in a multicultural world and living together with different cultures is already a reality.
- Yes, because every culture has some elements that welcome other cultures
- Yes, because the encounter with diversity enriches everyone
- Yes, because cultural contamination is a sign of change but also of the vitality of a society
- Yes, but as long as there is no domination of one cultural model over another
- No, because local cultures are increasingly characterized by closures and nationalisms
- No, because it is difficult for any culture to open up to others
- No, because every culture must be protected from contamination by other cultures
- No, because those who belong to a dominant reality (social, economic, cultural) tend to make their position prevail

59. Based on gender, your friends are *

Choose one of the following answers

- Only men
- Almost all men
- Men and women, in equal parts
- Almost all women
- All women

60 Based on nationality, your friends are *

Choose one of the following answers

- All of my nationality
- Almost all of my nationality
- From my own and different nationalities, in equal parts
- Almost all from nationalities other than mine
- All of them are from nationalities other than mine

61. In your opinion, to what extent are the following elements more useful for living in a multicultural formative context?

Answer per line *

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

| | Very useful | Quite useful | Little useful | Not useful at all | I don't know |
|---|-------------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Ability to communicate appropriately and effectively | | | | | |
| Knowledge of the language | | | | | |
| Knowledge of historical, political, religious backgrounds | | | | | |
| Knowledge of one's own culture | | | | | |
| Awareness that every culture is dynamic and plural | | | | | |
| Ability to suspend judgment | | | | | |
| Ability to handle stereotypes and prejudices | | | | | |
| Ability to decentralise and empathize | | | | | |
| Ability to understand the other's viewpoint | | | | | |
| Ability to find shared horizons | | | | | |
| Willingness to tell your story | | | | | |
| Ability to handle conflicts | | | | | |

62. Living in a multicultural formative context is giving you

*Answer per line **

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

| | Very much agree | Quite agree | Little agree | Don't agree at all | Not responding |
|---|-----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Stress/anxiety | | | | | |
| Feeling often confused | | | | | |
| Knowledge of a language other than my own | | | | | |
| Loneliness / Isolation | | | | | |
| A plural and multicultural world view | | | | | |
| The ability to empathise | | | | | |
| The belief that it is better to be formed in a homogeneous cultural context | | | | | |
| An enrichment of my cultural identity | | | | | |
| An impoverishment of my cultural identity | | | | | |
| The rediscovery of some aspects of my cultural tradition | | | | | |
| The ability to see the world from different viewpoints | | | | | |



Submit your survey.
Thank you for completing this survey.



Interview Outlines

❖ Luca Pandolfi

Interviews with teachers, university students and formators of consecrated life communities were conducted on the basis of the proposed outlines. Information for transcribing the interview text is provided at the end of this document.

The outline for the interview with formators of consecrated life communities

1. Often, in social analysis, in educational provision, in information dissemination or in the mass media, the words multiculturalism and interculturalism are used interchangeably and as synonyms. Do you detect a difference between the two, and if so, how do they differ?
2. We live in a multicultural reality. When, and in what way, is this an opportunity?
3. When, and in what way, is it a problem?
4. Have you ever experienced a communication or interrelational problem with a person belonging to a cultural tradition which is different from yours? Can you describe it briefly?
5. In your view, how can problematic situations like the ones you have described be overcome?
6. What kind of attention to multicultural interaction is included in the formation proposals made to the people who live in your situation? Can you describe them briefly?
7. We are in a multicultural context. How is this reflected in the choice of educators? (In their multicultural origin, for example, or the choice of people with solid multicultural experience, or in possession of intercultural skills.)
8. If you could make any suggestions to the Institution where you are an educator, what would you propose?

The outline for the interview with university teachers

1. Often, in social analysis, in educational provision, in information dissemination or in the mass media, the words multiculturalism and interculturalism are used interchangeably and as synonyms. Do you detect a difference between the two, and if so, how do they differ?
2. We live in a multicultural reality. When, and in what way, is this an opportunity?
3. When, and in what way, is it a problem?
4. Have you ever experienced a communication or interrelational problem with a person belonging to a cultural tradition which is different from yours? Can you describe it briefly?
5. In your view, how can problematic situations like the ones you have described be overcome?
6. What kind of attention to multicultural interaction is included in the educational proposals made by the people who live in your situation? Can you describe them briefly?
7. We are in a multicultural context. How does this change your didactic provision (lesson content, language used in lessons and manuals, bibliographies required at examinations)?
8. If you could make any suggestions to the Institution where you are a teacher or a student, what would you propose?



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Method of conducting, recording and transcribing the interview

The interviewer fills in the form below in which he/she collects some information about the person, the place and date of the interview; he/she specifies that the interview is anonymous and asks permission to record, then activates the device and starts filling in the form. He/she first fills in the personal details, then proceeds with the questions, writing under each question personal notes, comments and interesting aspects that emerge from the interview.

The interviewer then transcribes both the interview and the personal notes in full.

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|-------------|-------------|-----------|--|
| Interview Date and Time | | Start time: | | End time: | |
| Interview location | | | | | |
| Interviewer | | | | | |
| Information on the respondent | Age | Sex | Nationality | Role | Years of teaching or experience as a trainer |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |





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Part Three

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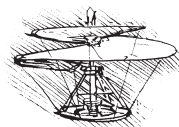
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Education in Multiculturality Education to Interculturality

In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education
and in Formation Communities
for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy

Edited by
Enrica Ottone – Luca Pandolfi

This volume is the outcome of an action-research project funded by GHR (Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhorst) Foundation, Minneapolis (MN, USA), conducted in Italy over four years (2018-2021), and concluded with an international and highly attended International Congress in Rome (November 17-19, 2021). The action-research group was made up of a considerable number of participants from Ecclesiastical Institutions of higher education and formation communities of female and male Consecrated Life Institutes in Italy – in particular, only institutions and communities with a highly multicultural population (teachers, students, people in formation) have been selected.

Research and discussions results can be outlined as follows: in the education communities involved in the action-research, multiculturalism is a *fait accompli* while interculturality does not actually go beyond the formal level of the declarations of intents; difficulties persist in the implementation of systematic research and planning; program actions aimed at an enduring formation that promotes, supports and fosters the now increasingly needed intercultural competences are barely incipient. Nevertheless, although we still have a long way to go, we got going.

* * *

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