



**RESEARCH, TEACHING AND
ACTIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**
ON THE UN SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS

EDITED BY **MARÍA ALCANTUD-DÍAZ**

Research, Teaching
and Actions in Higher
Education on the
UN Sustainable
Development Goals

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ETHNOCULTURAL DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VALENCIA:
*RESEARCH AND ACTIONS
IN HIGHER EDUCATION*

ELENA MUT MONTALVÁ

ELENA.MUT@UV.ES

JORDI GINERMONFORT

JORDI.GINER@UV.ES

YAIZA PÉREZ ALONSO

YAIZA.PEREZ@UV.ES

FRANCISCO TORRES PÉREZ

FRANCISCO.TORRES@UV.ES

UNIVERSITY OF VALENCIA (SPAIN)

Abstract

This chapter presents and analyses the most significant results of an analysis of the ethnocultural diversity of students at the University of Valencia (UV), carried out in 2019 and promoted by the Vice-Rectorate for Equality, Diversity and Sustainability, within the framework of the Diversitats project. The aim of this analysis was, on the one hand, to ascertain the discourses on and perceptions of ethnocultural diversity among the general student body at the University of Valencia and, on the other hand, to identify the needs and obstacles that students of diverse ethnic and cultural origins face in their everyday university life.

Keywords: Discourses of ethnocultural diversity, Equality, High Education Students, Sustainability

1. Introduction and theoretical perspective guiding the research

The University as an institution is immersed in a continuous process of change and adaptation that reflects the transformations in the heart of the society in which it is embedded. The universities of the nineteenth century and a good part of the twentieth century can be understood as part of the nation-state, typified by cultural uniformity and the education of social elites. However, since the last third of the twentieth century, Spanish universities have democratised access and are now typified by their massive nature, complexity and growing diversity — from a variety of sources. One is the multinational character of modern Spain, often denied in Spain's recent history. Another, much more recent, the source is the ethnocultural diversity resulting from the presence of the sons and daughters of immigrants who, in the last three decades, came to Spain and settled here, as well as the presence of Spanish Roma — a secular minority group in Spanish society — who have only entered into university classrooms in the last few decades.

The Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are based on a comprehensive and inclusive vision to build more cohesive and egalitarian societies that are based on sustainability, gender equality, the validity of human rights, and the reduction of the multidimensional effects of poverty and inequality. It proposes — to a lesser extent — a rethinking of the current model of production and consumption.

All of this affects the University at different levels and generates various debates. At the level of content, it concerns the need to reflect on current curricula “determined by the nexus between knowledge and economic growth” (Barandiaran & Cardona, 2015: 34), with students as instruments in the service of economic growth, or the debate on whether curricula should prioritise students' comprehensive development or certain skills or competencies (Walker, 2012). In this regard, in line with the challenges posed by the SDGs, universities need to become engaged so that knowledge can contribute to human and sustainable development as much as to growth. In addition, the UNESCO report (2015) cautions against the process of homogenising universities in an increasingly diverse world, both at the global level and also locally. If universities do not take their closest contexts into account, this will have a negative impact on their own role and on the equality of opportunities of their students. Similarly, universities must debate whether they are to focus on adapting students to the society that

currently exists, or encouraging students to get involved in improving society and reducing inequalities and injustices.

Within this framework, the need is raised to overcome a pragmatic approach to education that reproduces the status quo and solely endeavours to train professionals. Therefore, it is necessary to promote students' commitment to the construction of inclusive societies and to value the diversity of people and their contexts in order to go beyond the standardised learning that can be witnessed by the uniformity of university curricula. Universities must adapt to social and sociodemographic changes and, although they cannot alone meet the challenges of the SDGs, they can contribute to a model of human, inclusive and sustainable development that addresses these challenges.

In this context, one example that reveals this change of direction is the 2015 University Strategy, which establishes university social responsibility as one of its cornerstones. It makes a recommendation to Spanish universities to improve equal opportunities, inclusiveness and student participation in university life. Nevertheless, despite the positive changes that have taken place (such as the advances in the equality for women), the entirely positivist concept of the university as a space of pure knowledge, whose members have to detach themselves from their differentiated and unequal social situations and from their sexual, gender, cultural, ethnic or other identities, is still deeply rooted (Pichardo & Puche, 2019). This conception clashes with the reality of the university community itself, which is much more heterogeneous in social and cultural terms and in terms of life choices, particularly among the student body.

Few Spanish universities have taken up the challenge of beginning the process of making visible, recognising and promoting the effective guarantee of equality among the university community. Despite some initiatives, Spanish universities have not paid due attention to the situation of ethnocultural diversity in their classrooms. This is in contrast to the existing abundance of studies on immigration and education, such as Martínez (2014), among others, and the lack of research on university students of immigrant origin, with some exceptions (González, 2008). Similarly, studies on the entry of the Roma community into universities are fairly limited (Padilla, González & Soria, 2017).

In our analysis of ethnocultural diversity, we highlight the relevance of intersectionality as a theoretical and analytical concept. The position and situation of individuals and groups cannot be properly captured if we limit

ourselves to a single factor, as they are “generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways” (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016:14). Moreover, this concept serves as a tool for exploring the analytical categories with which we construct reality. Thus, it becomes evident that the categories of class, ethnicity, identity and other significant and relevant classes, are not “natural” or monolithic, do not generate homogeneous groups, and must be understood in terms of their mutual interrelation and materialisation in a specific context (Platero, 2012).

2. Methodology

The research presented here is of an exploratory and descriptive nature regarding ethnocultural diversity at the University of Valencia, from a dual perspective. On the one hand, the viewpoint of the general student body on the presence of ethnocultural diversity and, on the other, the viewpoint of the ethnoculturally diverse student body on their everyday life and interrelations with the different university actors. Given the limited resources of our research, we have not attempted to capture the broad ethnocultural heterogeneity which, albeit in a minority form, already characterises the student body at the University of Valencia. Our research focused on three groups: Afro-descendant students, students with hijabs, and Roma students, which together combine various factors of interest (phenotypical diversity, religion and ethnic markers, and social perception and status), allowing us to capture their impact on campus reality.

Our research is focused on four specific objectives: 1. To ascertain the discourses on and perceptions of ethnocultural diversity among the students at the three University campuses (Burjassot, Tarongers & Blasco Ibáñez); 2. To identify the needs, demands and obstacles of the three selected groups, along with the factors that generate them; 3. To provide information that makes it possible to develop action steps, in the short and medium-term, to improve the inclusion of ethnoculturally diverse students; and 4. To provide criteria and guidelines for a greater understanding of equality and to improve the management of ethnocultural diversity in the university environment.

One aspect that restricts the research design is the lack of statistical data on how many students with significant ethnic, religious, sexual and gender differences we have at the University of Valencia. In Spain, as in all of Europe, and for reasons that are more than justified, data on ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and other issues that are considered sensitive are

prohibited. Furthermore, we are talking about fluid differences, sometimes having poorly defined boundaries, which are handled differently according to the person and situation. Our choice has been to approach ethnoculturally diverse students through contacts via student associations and/or others of a more general nature, in addition to our own contacts as teachers (using a non-probabilistic snowball sampling).

This research has been carried out with a methodological structure based on complementary juxtaposition, that is to say, by simultaneously combining various techniques of qualitative social research: discussion groups and individual and group interviews. In terms of the general student body, three discussion groups were held with students, one on each campus of the University of Valencia. We considered this technique, in which participants do not know each other, to be the most appropriate way to capture opinions while minimising the bias of “political correctness”. With regard to the selected groups of ethnoculturally diverse students, three group interviews and two individual interviews were carried out. A total of 23 students participated in the discussion groups and a further 12 were interviewed.

In order to address the complexity of ethnocultural diversity in the University environment, our analysis was organised on two levels with a transversal perspective: on the one hand, to capture the opinions and experiences of the entire student body on what they understand by diversity/diversities, the importance they give to the matter, and how they evaluate their daily university life from this perspective, if indeed they do so; and on the other hand, to comprehend the perspective of students from ethnocultural groups – who, due to their identity, face specific obstacles and needs — from a transversal perspective. This text presents this transversal focus, that of students in general and that of the students with significant diversities, in order to approach this reality.

3. Discourses on and perceptions of ethnocultural diversity among the general student body at the University of Valencia

In the discussion groups on diversity with the general student body, numerous discourses arise in which diversity is associated with sexual orientation, gender, functional diversity and social class, but references to ethnocultural diversity are practically non-existent. When ethnic diversity is mentioned, there seems to be widespread confusion between ethnicity, culture, social class, and immigration. Some conceive of ethnic diversity as

something linked to the place of birth and the phenotypical features associated with that region, whereas others also consider culture, beliefs, and ways of life as elements that identify ethnic diversity. Occasionally, ethnic diversity appears to be linked to the combination of culture and race, and sometimes it is associated with socioeconomic status and social exclusion.

Some of the participating students associate ethnic diversity with a culture of a different origin to the “native” one, whether they are immigrants, descendants of immigrants, or Erasmus students. With regard to students from migrant backgrounds, the distinction made is particularly striking. On the one hand, those students whose phenotypical features are not very different from those considered “native”, and who have the same school culture, way of speaking, etc., are not labelled as ethnic. They are, we could say, “invisible”. In these cases, the majority are students of Latin American and Eastern European origin. On the other hand, when we speak of ethnic diversity, this is reserved for and identified with students of immigrant origin with distinctive phenotypical traits and intra-group sociability. Not only are they “visible”, but they are perceived as only mixing with people from their own group.

The perception of the general student body is that ethnic diversity at the university is very low or non-existent. Even though diversity is considered to be low, it is claimed that it is not homogeneously distributed across the different campuses of the University of Valencia, but is concentrated in certain faculties and degrees (mainly in Humanities and Social Sciences). Some participants point out that there is an under-representation of ethnoculturally diverse groups compared to the reality of Valencian society, and with their presence in earlier phases of education. Their comments¹ cite various reasons for the low presence of ethnocultural diversity in the classrooms, some of which are external to the University and others internal, being the responsibility of the University itself.

Among the limitations that are external to the University, the initial socio-economic situation of the family (social class) and reservations about formal education attributed to certain cultures (exemplified by the Roma ethnic group) are highlighted. Among the obstacles within the University, some participants highlight the use of Valencian (although there are teaching

¹ The original comments were stated in Spanish and Catalan and translated into English, taking into account that the resulting text must transmit the essence of the original phrase.

groups in Spanish and Valencian). Other students mention that the institution is not prepared to respond to ethnic diversity either in the classroom or in society and, therefore, reproduces existing stereotypes, although the issues preventing a better response are not specified. Although this question is clearly not considered a priority, some of the students stressed that the inclusion of ethnic diversity in the University, at the curricular and university life levels, could help to reduce social prejudices, better understand social reality, and improve their preparation as future professionals.

The needs and obstacles of ethnoculturally diverse students at the University of Valencia

3.1. Afro-descendent students: the visible stigma

Generally speaking, the students we contacted did not report having had difficulties in accessing university. They refer to the environment they experience at the UV as inclusive and welcoming. They are students who have Spanish nationality, which is a priori an advantage over other groups:

“Um... Let’s see, well in my case, I haven’t encountered any difficulties, either in class or when it comes to submitting papers or anything. But, more than anything, it’s because I’m Spanish. So, um... with that in mind, as I’ve got the DNI [Spanish ID card] and everything, it’s really not a problem.”
(EG7-2)

In contrast, a self-limiting barrier is detected that acts as an invisible obstacle: unlike other groups, their phenotypical features make them more identifiable, which makes it easier for prejudices and stereotypes that relate skin colour to concepts such as *foreignness* or *underdevelopment* to come into play, which we can duly label as racist (Rocu et al., 2019). This situation is exacerbated when the phenotype is accompanied by other cultural markers, such as the wearing of a hijab. One of our interviewees revealed her indecision when it came to choosing her studies, as she did not believe that a person with a hijab could dedicate herself to teaching, precisely because of the lack of clear references.

“I’ve never seen teachers and [...] and never... in the whole of Spain, has there been, I don’t think, a teacher with a hijab, a veil. So, it’s like... it’s like I was afraid they’d say no because if there aren’t any... and I know that there are people who have studied teaching, well it’s a bit strange in the end, you know? [...] And then, um... when it came to choosing a degree, maybe, because I wanted to be a teacher but... I was a bit afraid that, because I wore

a veil and so on, they would tell me that I couldn't work face-to-face dealing with the public, that, I don't know... And so I decided to do [another degree]." (EG7-1)

Other markers that, more or less consciously, intervene as exclusion factors are first names and surnames. While these play a secondary role in other groups, some interviewees considered that they may give rise to different treatment. This is the case of the brother of one of our respondents, whose Arabic name had a bearing on the way he was treated by his classmates. Nevertheless, in the interviews, only two situations were identified in which we could clearly invoke racism.

"Let's see, yes, his skin colour could [be a problem], but also his name... In fact, he's thought of changing his name because he doesn't like it, because he thinks that, that people will think that... 'They'll call me a *moro*' [term for Moor/Muslim with pejorative connotations], I don't know, something like that. Because those are things that he endured as a child, and so on... And it creates a psychological [wound]... in your self-esteem, in your worth as a person, because... being different shouldn't be something bad, on the other hand, many people make it into a kind of a weapon... I don't know, something to fling at you." (EG7-2)

The students of African-American origin still have a minority presence at the UV. This is not only due to factors such as the limitation of grants and scholarships but also to cultural and class factors; consequently, this group, like other ethnically diverse groups, do not continue beyond earlier educational phases.

Separately, one demand from students of African-American origin is to include the perspective of the South in teaching, in the same way as has been achieved with other perspectives, such as gender. This inclusion is especially significant in subjects that deal with historical processes linked to colonialism and its derivatives — as is the case of literature or economics — paying particular emphasis to the former Spanish colonies.

"I see everything as being very Eurocentric, even history itself, the way it's taught, it seems like an outrage when things like colonialism are taught, without any kind of reflective perspective, of how that has affected today, and... From that point of view, I think that I, as... I don't know, through training, can make... not change it, but certainly open up new fields, for example, I have realised that um... there are very few intercultural studies, in Spanish, of studies on people of African descent..." (EG7-2)

However, the interviewees do not conform to the majority profile of the Afro-descendant group of people in Spain. First, because they did not participate in the migratory movement that brought them to Spain; instead, it was their parents that made the journey. Second, because the parents of these students already had previous education, to a greater or lesser extent than those of other groups of students analysed. Unlike other groups, such as Roma students, they do not mention any economic problems or difficulties affecting their university life. In short, this Afro-descendant group of students appears to correspond to a minority of families who are well off. We should not forget that most of the Afro-descendant people in Spanish society, from working-class families, never reach university, which reproduces the self-limiting barrier and the absence of racialised profiles to imitate.

Finally, a problem that affects all groups of foreign origin is the processes of validation and homologation of studies carried out in the country of origin, something that at minimum delays, and may even complicate or impede entry to university.

“And then, for example, friends my age, who come from Arab countries and so on, who... for example, have even done their baccalaureate and now want to start university. So, um... How do you get into the university? Having studied their baccalaureate there, they have to do the PAU [university entrance examination] [...] you have to go to the distance learning university, which is in Mislata [...] but since they come with... different subjects... They haven't studied the history of Spain, which is obligatory, then [...] These types of bureaucratic things, also make it difficult, and there comes a time when people get a little tired of always having to press for things, and give up.” (EG7-2)

3.2. Students with a hijab: the omnipresence of the ethnic marker

In the interviews with Muslim students who wear a hijab, it was noted that in today's Spain, even in a university context, the group considered as 'Muslim', 'Moroccan' or simply 'Arab' arouse suspicion, even a more or less generalised Islamophobia (Fernández, Valbuena & Caro, 2016; Martin & Grosfoguel, 2012).

Our interviewees do not mention any obstacles or difficulties in accessing university, nor in choosing a degree or in their relationship with the administration. Broadly speaking, they feel welcome at the University and well treated by the rest of the students. Their statements do not mention

economic obstacles, family or other problems, which does not mean that they do not have them; the question, for them, is focused on their identity symbolised and displayed by the hijab.

The students interviewed understand that wearing a hijab marks them out, as an ethnic marker (Mijares & Ramírez, 2008), although they value the university environment more positively than that of high school, due to the students' greater maturity, the higher possibility of avoiding people they do not want to see, and being able to choose the most cosmopolitan environments and relationships.

“If there's a difference... obviously university isn't as hard as high school... it's a mix of things, right? Of the age, and that you aren't in such close contact with people, and at university, you also see more [variety of] people.” (EG2-1)

Despite their initial positive evaluation, they do mention having observed comments and practices influenced by negative stereotypes. One interviewee cites the routine use of Spanish instead of Valencian when someone addresses her, just because she wears a hijab.

“I've been speaking Valencian all my life because I went into the Valencian stream at school when I was four years old. I mean, I speak it well... It happens to me a lot, that I go to talk to the teachers, and I speak to them in Valencian... and, and they change to Spanish! It's like, they just assume you don't know!

I2. Straight away! It's the same for me

I1. Yeah, yeah, and what is more, you have to speak to them several times in Valencian until they process, that yes, indeed, I'm speaking to them in Valencian.” (EG2-1)

Similarly, disbelief is often encountered when interviewees respond that they are Valencian since the wearing of a hijab is interpreted as signifying a foreign identity. Thus, upon hearing their first answer, their interlocutors usually repeat the same question to see if they receive a more satisfactory response.

“It's assuming the hijab means you're an immigrant, or from abroad, and me, for example, when they ask me where I'm from, and [I say] from Valencia! It's like, no, no, no! But where are you from? But where are you from?

I1. Yes, that happens to me too

I2. From Valencia! [they laugh], so then, ah, but what's your background? Oh, my parents are of Moroccan origin... But, if you are asking me where

I'm from, and I was born here, grew up here, and I consider this to be my country; I'm from here, and that's it." (EG2-2)

Although a minority, interviewees reported some offensive or xenophobic comments made by students and teachers. In one case, a peer of one of our interviewees stated, in public and in front of her, that Muslims should be expelled from the country, thereby making a clear identification of Muslims, with a radical, terrorist threat. In another case, a teacher of Food Science reproached his student for her lack of professionalism in observing the religious precepts of Ramadan, in front of the whole class.

"They were handing out the exam, and one teacher, who wasn't even the subject teacher, but the... support teacher, the invigilator... he was just handing the exam to me, and he stands in front of me, and he already knew me from other things... and he says to me 'What about you? Are you doing Ramadan?' And it was just the first day or so, and I said, like, 'Yeah. Like I'm in exam mode, we hadn't even started... And he says 'So you're not eating?' And I say 'No', and he says 'You don't drink either?' And I say 'No', and I'm thinking, 'What's all this about? Can I just... please?' And he says 'Well, if I were your teacher, I'd already have given you a fail.' So I just took the exam, and I passed." (EG2-1)

As is also the case with those of African descent, the students with a hijab criticise the low visibility of Muslim culture at the University of Valencia — particularly of Muslim women — and, moreover, that it is often presented as a homogeneous whole. They believe that there is a duty to make the heterogeneity of the group known, to show different types of women with a hijab and, in short, to normalise them.

"There are a lot of movements in this faculty, many women's events and so on... it seems like it's simply aimed at Western women... but as for aiming at what Muslim women are, I think a little bit of... information is missing. Spanish Islam is always addressed here as... more to do with immigrant people... who have come here and so on. But the Islam that exists here, which is the everyday Islam, no, I don't think there is much about it. Perhaps that's also our fault because we should drive things more and... and try to promote it more." (EI8)

3.3. Roma students: between invisibility and stereotype

It is impossible to quantify the Roma student body in the UV. Although everything would appear to indicate that the number increases each year, recent studies reveal that only 7.7% of the Spanish Roma community have post-compulsory education, compared to 40.9% of the general population

(MSSSI, 2017). Moreover, a significant part of the Roma student body is invisible as they are not involved in Roma associations and do not consider it necessary to present themselves as Roma in their immediate university environment.

Unlike the two previous groups, the main difficulty that Roma students have is economic, given that the cost of having a son or daughter study rather than work in the family business is very high. Moreover, although Roma families' interest in the education of their children has increased in recent years (MSSSI, 2017), there are no family members or close references who can serve as an example, or even from whom they can receive advice about how the education system operates. This lack of references and advice translates into a feeling of being lost, of at first not knowing the differences between high school and university, etc. Some basic rules, such as repeating exams, or the registration process for the beginning of the course, end up being understood through practice.

“The first difficulty I found was the money [...] Right, it's a public university, but within the public realm, it's expensive... for a normal family, I'm saying, for example, my mother has a salary of €542... so it's expensive. So, that's the first one, but well, with a lot of effort because in the end, I've been able to, and, apart from that, because of the scholarships and everything.” (EG1-5)

“14. The first year, I was taking the exams, without knowing that I could repeat them because nobody had explained anything to me.

15. That happened to me too.

14. I thought that was the baccalaureate.

15. Of course.

14. That if you failed it didn't matter.

15. That if you failed, you could repeat.

14. That the next year you have to pay double tuition fees, here, my friend didn't know anything either, I was going... The next year I showed up with the tuition fees... and my father said: 'But what happened?' I said: 'I don't know; it got expensive'.” (EG1-4-5)

One of the aspects emphasised by the Roma students is the greater degree of pressure they are under regarding their academic results. Such pressure comes as much from the environment as it is self-imposed. On the one hand, because access to scholarships depends on their grades. On the other hand, because some of the students combine their studies with family work, so the time they can dedicate to their studies is not the same as that of their non-Roma peers.

“Roma families do not have the same possibilities as other families and it’s definitely a handicap because you are dealing with a lot more pressure [...] I had to stop [studying], earn some money, and then I came back. Of course, um... I’ve worked all through my degree, so it’s not just a matter of getting a scholarship or tuition or not, it’s a matter of sometimes needing money to function.” (EG1-4)

Despite the fact that the atmosphere in the University of Valencia is described as positive, they do mention some comments referring to stereotypes, such as that which views Roma people as uncultured and without studies, or, in other cases, the use of Roma people to exemplify social problems such as dropping out of school, criminal behaviour, or drug dealing.

“My teachers do not explain drug crime as drug crime to do with criminals... They explain drug crime as to do with Roma people.” (EG-2)

“In education, it also happened when... when talking about dropping out of school, they always gave you the kinds of examples of Roma people, which yes, okay, it’s true... depending on how you explain it... it may be well focused or not.” (EG-3)

As with the previous cases, our interviewees believed the Roma question to be absent from the curriculum and that, when it is present, it is biased and focuses on social problems, as mentioned above.

4. Conclusions

The research has identified various levels of perception, relevance, interest and visibility of ethnocultural diversity among students at the University of Valencia.

For the general student body, the issue of ethnocultural diversity is of little relevance; it is a confusing and distant concept since they consider that it does not affect them or only affects them a little, although they show, a priori, a receptive and positive attitude towards diversity. The presence of students of different ethnocultural origins in the University is perceived as very low or non-existent and with an unequal distribution according to campus and degree, with a greater presence in Humanities and Social Sciences. Part of the general student body stated that the presence of ethnically and culturally diverse students in the University does not reflect the current composition of Valencian society, which was a new idea for the rest of the participants in the discussion groups. This is evidence of the lack

of critical reflection on the obstacles to accessing higher education — due to economic, ethnic and cultural reasons — for part of the population of Valencia.

Part of the general student body and the ethnoculturally diverse students interviewed consider that the University of Valencia has not managed to incorporate ethnocultural diversity into the institution, either in the classrooms, in the curricula of the bachelor's and master's degrees, or in the image of the institution. In fact, the students of African descent, Roma, and those who wear a hijab consider that their presence in the University is a conscious and considered act on their part, mined with obstacles that they must avoid, some of which are more visible and others less so. Some obstacles are of an economic nature, as the Roma students highlight. Other obstacles, as all three groups highlight, are of a cultural nature and of the social — and University — vision of their diversity.

The students of these groups consider the University environment as inclusive and welcoming, especially in comparison with their experience in high school. However, some of our interviewees describe and detail situations or comments of overt racism on the part of some teachers or students, which are serious, although in a minority. On the other hand, their accounts are full of situations, events and speeches marked by symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1999), on the part of teachers and students, and in the curricula of the subjects themselves. One example of this symbolic violence, which is quite prevalent, can be defined as “*Where are you from?*” when, because you are black or wear a hijab, you are viewed as the classmate who cannot be from Valencia. Another could be called “*You don't seem like one*”, upon discovering the identity of the student as Roma, it is considered that university studies are incompatible with being Roma. These and other similar expressions reveal the operation of symbolic power — unconsciously but visibly — which, according to Bourdieu, reproduces and imposes a legitimate vision of the existing divisions in society, both to maintain social order and to bring about the affected groups' acceptance of the situation of inequality or discrimination.

Most of the students who participated in the discussion groups think that the University of Valencia should integrate ethnocultural diversity, through a welcoming and respectful focus, at various levels: integration into the curricula and awareness and training of the University community (teaching and research staff, administrative and service staff, and students). The majority perceive the inclusion of ethnic and cultural diversity in university

life as a possible factor of enrichment in both the personal and professional spheres. Along the same lines, the orientation of Agenda 2030, the SDGs and that of UNESCO (2015) should be integrated in order to go beyond the pragmatic approach towards education, reduced to the training of professionals, and to promote the role of universities as drivers of social transformation by providing students with the knowledge, tools and commitment to building inclusive and sustainable societies. In the words of Barandiaran (2015: 34), “the challenge of not only generating advanced human capital, but producing individuals with critical awareness, would have to choose whether it wants the individual to acquire knowledge *to have more*, or *to be more* and *to be more able*”.

In short, universities must foster social change in the complex, heterogeneous and diverse societies of the twenty-first century by promoting frameworks of coexistence that value diversity and respect for differences. Additionally, universities must be critical of the structures that perpetuate the oppression and exclusion of certain groups on economic or cultural grounds, due to their origins, or for other reasons. In this sense, the role of universities in educating students should go beyond preparing them for their employment and should also be geared towards the training of critical, reflective and inclusive citizens who accept diversity.

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