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Coordinadores

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Contemporary educational challenges
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Salesian Education for innovation
and Participation in Contexts of Crisis

2022

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Presentación

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Integral Ecology and Interculturality: Which Representations and Experiences in University Students?

Sostenibilidad e interculturalidad: representaciones y experiencias en estudiantes universitarios

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Abstract

The aim of this study is based on the qualitative analysis of the results of a research project, carried out between 2020 and 2021, concerning the representations and experiences of sustainability and interculturality of a sample of students belonging to three Salesian universities (IUSVE of Venice Mestre, IUSTO of Turin, CES Don Bosco- Madrid) of the degrees of Pedagogy, Psychology, Communication and Education. On the basis of a previously applied and separate questionnaire on the research topic, general guidelines for its implementation and clarification were formulated using other research techniques such as interviews and focus groups. The outcomes of the research showed a specific attention of the "Millennials" on issues related to the environment, climate change, environmental volunteering, and advocacy. The influence of the media and social networks on the information-education plan in terms of sustainability and multi/interculturality is highlighted. The work done recognizes the influence of digital technologies and social media on multi/intercultural issues. Finally, we would like to emphasize that the constant scientific dialogue between the researchers in all phases of the research, besides being fruitful, has opened up a particularly valuable horizon of intercultural exchange and networking.

Keywords

Representations, Lifestyles, Sustainability and Interculturality, Young University Students.

Resumen

Este trabajo tiene como objetivo presentar el análisis cualitativo de los resultados de un proyecto de investigación, realizado entre 2020 y 2021, sobre las representaciones y experiencias de sostenibilidad e interculturalidad de una muestra de estudiantes pertenecientes a tres universidades salesianas (IUSVE de Venecia Mestre, IUSTO de Turín y CES Don Bosco de Madrid) de las carreras de Pedagogía, Psicología, Comunicación y Educación. A partir de un cuestionario aplicado con anterioridad, sobre el tema objeto de investigación, se formularon unas líneas generales para la implementación y clarificación del mismo, mediante la utilización de otras técnicas de investigación como entrevistas y grupos focales. En los resultados de la investigación se ha podido constatar la atención específica de los *millennials* a temas relativos al medio ambiente, cambio climático, voluntariado en campo ecológico y reivindicación o defensa de la naturaleza. Se pone de relieve la influencia de los medios de comunicación y las redes sociales en el plan de información-educación, en lo que se refiere a la sostenibilidad en la multi- interculturalidad. El trabajo realizado reconoce la influencia de las tecnologías digitales y los medios sociales en las cuestiones multi-interculturales. Por último, queremos resaltar que el constante diálogo científico entre los investigadores durante todas las fases de la investigación, además de ser fructífero, abrió un horizonte de intercambio intercultural y de redes especialmente valioso.

Palabras clave

Representaciones, estilos de vida, sostenibilidad, interculturalidad, jóvenes universitarios.

*Nature challenges us to be in solidarity
and attentive to the custody of creation,
also to prevent, as far as possible, the most serious
consequences* (Pope Francesco during the Angelus
in St Peter's Square, February 9th, 2014).

Introduction

The present contribution is aimed at presenting the part of the analysis, with a qualitative matrix, carried out from 2020 to 2021, which concerns the results of a research that has among its aims that of investigating the representations and experiences of sustainability and interculturality of a sample of students belonging to three Salesian Universities (IUSVE of Venice Mestre: 18 students, IUSTO of Turin: 11 students, CES Don Bosco of Madrid: 12 students) and attending the Three-year and Two-year courses in Pedagogy, Psychology and Communication. In this exploratory analysis we don't report age and gender of our participants and we address them generally as young people, according to the student role they have.

Some questions served as a theoretical collector and gave considerable impetus to the research design, which also included the online administration of a questionnaire whose analysis was carried out using quantitative matrices. Here are some questions: "What are the information, training, experiences and representations of sustainability and interculturality? What are the possible links between these two themes? What knowledge and practices are in place or still to be promoted?" Hence the genesis of the stimulus questions, shared by the three scientific partners, which animated the realization of interviews and focus groups as methods which proved to be particularly relevant not only for the purposes of the planned survey, but for having constituted profitable opportunities to activate reflexivity and stimuli for change in the participants involved in the survey. The researchers identified the interview as the most appropriate method for investigating the phenomena from a socio-pedagogical point of view, detecting the ways in which the individual experiences of the participants fit within the phenomena of environmental sustainability and interculturality. The method proved to be appropriate because it was able to stimulate the search for meaning for each student interviewed, accompanied through

the questions asked to better define his thoughts, explain definitions and positions, with the aim of "bring out the meanings, implicit assumptions, tacit rules that guide behavior and give meaning to events". (Tarozzi, 2008, p. 78)

The interview outline was designed on the basis of the literature and the first results that emerged from the quantitative research that the team as a whole conducted and was refined during the administration process (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001; Charmaz, 2006). The text of the interview was divided into two parts referring to the two themes of this work, sustainability and interculturality, each section then articulated in three wide-open stimuli, such as to allow the individual interview to explore the contents in an original way: the fundamental task of the interviewer was to seek a balance between narration and reconstruction of the meaning that the experiences narrated have for the interviewed.

The participants were selected by random sampling and by drawing them from the list of those enrolled in the three-year and master's degree courses of the respective universities. This method of sampling students was chosen to decrease the self-selection bias, which however did not eliminate a certain degree of self-selection on the part of the participants.

The outline followed for the narrative animation of the interviews, is aimed to investigate representations, experiences and stories of everyday life from the prompts of the moderators. The participants were proposed the two key themes of the research, which articulated the course of the meetings: in the first part a reflection on sustainability was proposed, in the second part the boys and girls involved were asked to discuss the theme of interculturality.

The period covered by the research coincided with one of the acute phases of the pandemic emergency with the consequent closure of all university activities in attendance. Interviews were con-

ducted using Microsoft® Teams platform, Google Meet platform and they have been video recorded.

The outcomes analysis, first of all, required a necessary contextualization and a cautious generalization, considering that the corpus of data is closely linked to the characteristics of the contexts in which they were collected and which, as Bateson (1972) would say, are the matrix of their meanings. The analysis implied the identification of "core-categories", that is, the central categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) looking for the possible relationship between them through the links between the categories that emerged. Some aspects emerged from the interviews, although cautious in the action of comparative coding, confirm what emerged from the research in particular the specific attention that the "Millennials" place on environmental issues and specifically on the theme of climate change, with a personal investment in terms of voluntary actions, advocacy or protest. Other themes confirming the elements present in the same research concern the influence of the media and social networks on the information-formative level regarding sustainability (i.e. documentaries on Netflix, Greta Thunberg, etc.). The work carried out recognizes the same influence of digital technologies and social media on intercultural issues (i.e. playing with people from other countries on the PlayStation, TikTok, etc.). Interesting is the detection of categories and sub-categories linked to consumption, waste, responsibility, encounter with cultural diversity, the latter emerging more related to travel and less to experiences within friendships or in the community. The semantics are also interesting: in many answers, the use of the terms "interculture" and "multiculture" are often understood and expressed as synonyms or improperly described, but there is also awareness of the presence of forms of exclusion and discrimination against ethnic minorities, the need for policies aimed at integration and inclusion of migrants, curiosity and interest in getting to know people from different cultural backgrounds. There is also a widespread perception

of the school as a context capable of creating bridges of exchange, dialogue and confrontation, a privileged place which, in line with Favaro's thinking, can create areas of mutual understanding (Demetrio & Favaro, 1992), activate processes of inclusion if thought out and acted upon at a pedagogical and social level through the principles of interculturality.

In the following paragraphs we will go into the heart of the students' interviews and their respective analyses, which are a very fertile ground also in terms of the possible implications they entail, in particular on the need for a specific training contribution in relation to the two sectors characterizing the field of investigation which, in our opinion, must necessarily be included in the study plan and enhanced both in terms of targeted research and through new channels that can involve young people also through toolkits and other digital forms useful to reach them more effectively and creatively.

Last but not least, we would like to emphasize that the constant scientific dialogue between the researchers involved in all the stages of the research, as well as being fruitful for the scientific dialogue undertaken, has opened up a horizon of intercultural exchange and particularly valuable networks that we are keen to keep alive over time.

Results analysis, IUSVE corpus of data, Venice Mestre, Italy

Between sustainability and interculturality: experiences and practices

The first stimulus addressed to the participants asked them to recount an experience linked to the theme of sustainability. All the focus groups began by taking for granted the environmental dimension of the concept of sustainability, and this is already an element for reflection: our subjects, some more and some less sensitized to

green issues, assign the term sustainability to the semantic sphere of environmental protection. It has been observed that attention to waste leads to new practices, so being sustainable goes hand in hand with limiting consumption, which has to do with limiting, dividing and reducing, which is one of the three R's of sustainability, together with recycling and reuse.

Sustainability, then, is an attitude encompassing all experiences of life, embracing the environment and people, and in this sense is always enriching, over and above purely economic aspects.

Similarly, reflection on interculturality has revealed how it is a daily aspect of young people's lives, to which special attention is paid on the basis of personal experiences. What is evident is both, sustainability and interculturality, closely concern the personal experiences of the participants, but not in a way that is taken for granted like other aspects of daily life. In other words, sustainable and intercultural practices are in few cases sedimented, more often they are the result of experiences and reflections matured in the course of personal growth. They are therefore not baggage passed on through the process of intergenerational socialization, like so many others, but rather areas that require greater individual awareness and activation. Participants then talk about school, or community, or peer relations, and then about travel as training environments. Those who were able to have intercultural experiences in the family talk about the richness they have today, while the others underline the difference with the previous generations, which they describe as "closed, distrustful, or ignorant". One participant points out that: "Adults have to learn a lot from this behavior of children", i.e. how children relate to all people without preconceptions or prejudices. Another young person underlines that "our parents" are not "informed" and therefore do not have a proper awareness of environmental issues and "unfortunately they don't care". Therefore, it would be good if young people were educated at school, even as children, so

that they could take home these teachings that could then "influence" their parents. In a sort of "reversed socialization process". The new generations become the bearers of values and practices that extend to the previous ones, who would then no longer act solely out of convenience, ignorance or compulsion, but on the basis of a new shared culture.

Information and education

A relevant part of the discussions held within the focus groups concerned information sources, the way in which our participants gather knowledge on the topic of sustainability and interculturality.

A first level of analysis concerns the centrality of the socialization agencies in the first phase of an individual's growth, first of all the family and then the school. In particular, the school is mentioned on several occasions as a source of information and as a place for reflection, comparison and learning about sustainability. Some of them recall having done workshop experiences on differentiated waste collection, especially at primary school, or other awareness-raising activities. In general, the school is attributed a central role in the formation of knowledge but above all of sensitivity towards sustainability, even if its effectiveness is not considered sufficient, more should be done. On the intercultural side, school is a fundamental place, but not so much for knowledge as for opportunities for contact and relations between peers with different cultural backgrounds. It often happens that in the presence of pupils with different backgrounds, cultural knowledge paths are consequently activated. The school is also fundamental for the possibilities linked to trips abroad, such as Erasmus, which, according to our participants, "should be obligatory". Travelling means getting in touch with others, it means opening up compared to the closure that may be present in the family, it means growing as citizens.

In brief, there is no doubt that the school, like the family, is fundamental agents of socialization in the lives of young people. However, when we consider them in relation to two issues that are so topical for a country such as Italy, and in particular for the North-East, which is very advanced in terms of separate waste collection, for example, but not so advanced in terms of immigration, a number of specific considerations emerge. The family, for sustainability and interculturality, is very often a place of "inverted socialization", where it is the new generations that pass on knowledge, values and behavior to the older generations. The school is, above all, a learning environment for sustainability, but it should be strengthened, because what it does is not enough: sustainability is central and the school should put it at the center. Concerning interculturality, it is an irreplaceable place for exchange, relations and social and cultural growth; it could do more in this area too, but the focus is not on top-down education, but on opportunities for dialogue and comparison among peers.

On the topic of sustainability, TV and social media are mentioned as other sources of information —as socialization agencies—. Streaming platforms, in particular, offer compelling documentaries on various topics:

> In my case, the source of information was Netflix […] I happened, for example, to watch a documentary that talked about pollution all over the world and this, let's say, raised awareness, that is, it pushed me to behave in a more sustainable way, precisely because this documentary showed me that the risk is tangible. (P1-8)

Social media are also considered sources of information, along with websites and the internet in general. This scenario is not surprising, however it should be noted that some of our participants, i.e. those who have this type of source, state that they do not feel sufficiently informed, or that they are only superficially informed. Moreover, information based on documentaries or social networks cannot be considered exhaustive, also considering the

limited influence that schools have had, according to the participants' experiences, in shaping their environmental awareness. There is therefore a lack of information and training in the experiences of these boys and girls.

Alongside the observation of the inadequacy of their own information, two other reflections emerged: a more naive one and a more complex one. The first concerns the possibility of making up for the lack of sensitivity through impactful, even manipulative, communication:

> Television is widely watched so in the sense that for me you could also think of manipulating the masses by increasing advertisements proposing sustainable behavior. (P1-8)
> There is always profit in the middle, someone who wants to make a profit, but I think that it would be enough to have some strong testimonies from famous people or from people who are perhaps more visible […] famous, more visible than others to bring about this change in mentality. (P4-27)

One naively thinks that showing the results of pollution and climate disasters can lead to changes in daily behavior, thus shifting the agency from the subject to an external element that should be so impactful as to bring about change. The naivety of this approach is noted by one boy when he told of compulsory school meetings that used strong images but did not have much of an impact on his classmates. The idea of *strong* images and *strong* testimonies seems to allude to the need to shake sleepy consciences which, once awakened, can no longer pretend that nothing has happened, and therefore appears somewhat simplistic and perhaps even nostalgic for an idea of a manipulable society. Strong testimonies of famous people do exist and are readily available —think of Greta Thumberg, who was only marginally mentioned—, but the ideal suggests something unrealized and perhaps unattainable. On the other hand, there is also more complex reasoning starting from the very quality of the information available:

> From an information point of view we have more than we want. The difficulty is probably in putting all this information together because it's so complex, even when buying a product, for example, there are so many variables to consider that we often don't manage to evaluate them all. So there really is such a complex world that sometimes we are almost overwhelmed by all this information. And also understanding the dynamics behind all these things, having a global view is difficult at least for me. (P1-27)

In these cases, the fatigue associated with too much information and the difficulty to manage it become clear. This is certainly a less naïve reflection than the previous one because it considers not only the amount of information available, but also the ability of the individual to disentangle by himself from the complexity of sustainability issues.

However, there remains a temptation to reduce complexity to pre-packaged answers, such as that offered by P3-27 who concludes his reasoning by saying that there is "a purpose beyond cash that governs us". The fact that someone profits is one of the most frequent loopholes in trying to explain complexity. With regard to interculturality, of particular interest is the statement of some individuals who found insights on the social network TikTok:

> Where once you had to find yourself to make this exchange, now it's much more fluid. In the sense that you take TikTok and you watch the video of someone else who's on the other side of the world, that's it. (P3-27)
> I'm finding quite intercultural and very integrative, if you can say, a social in particular that is mainly used by young people and now, well, everybody is talking about it, that is TikTok […] I'm noticing that young people more and more are adopting a more and more open and more integrative mentality because if that person […] a certain person x published a video saying that "I was discriminated against, I had these problems" and so on and so forth, you would see a flurry of comments all positive but in the sense that they gave him comfort, in the sense that they said "Excuse us…

we apologise for that person there because these things should not happen". (P3-16)

Social networks, especially TikTok, which is scarcely frequented by adults, seem to reduce symbolic and cultural distances and make young people feel part of a digital global generation (Aroldi & Colombo, 2020), thus contributing to the creation of that generational bond from which civic and social participation can spring.

Results analysis, IUSTO corpus of data, Turin, Italy

Complex unity of the "common house"

The representation of the concept of environmental sustainability proposed by the young people interviewed refers to a vision that indissolubly connects ecological aspects with economic and social dimensions. The subject identified with number two clearly expresses this connection when he states:

> I'm going in the direction of eco-sustainability even if reflecting on it then there is also a sustainability of a social type I guess, economic, for example through the aid that a state can give its citizens, just at a monetary level, at an economic level to make everyone's life better. (S. 2)

The dimensions that characterize contemporaneity manifest themselves as an interconnected complex within which every action aimed at improving the quality of life of individuals seems to have to necessarily take into consideration multiple levels. A sectorized vision of the issues risks lowering their problematic nature and impact on the life of humanity as a whole. This too linear view tends to reassure, opening up to "blind, unconscious and irresponsible" positions, incapable of highlighting the gravity and unsustainability of the environmental crisis as it presents itself to our eyes (Ceruti, 2020). We can place in this hyper-simplifying framework the uncri-

tical faith in the future of technology, which in several reflections is identified as the solution on the horizon to get out of the environmental crisis.

On the other hand, the problematic issues regarding environmental sustainability open up competent views on the non-sustainability of contemporary societies built around a strong focus on the individual, with the consequent shift in the background of the community dimension and the widespread emergence of conditions of loneliness, which have been highlighted for some time now (Bauman, 2014). In the same way, the connection of the environmental crisis to the contemporary global economic development appears to be convergent: the current development model, ultimately identified in "techno-nihilistic capitalism" (Magatti, 2009), in "financial capitalism" (Gallino, 2011), compromises the sustainability of the environment. Financial capitalism, compromises the existence of majority portions of humanity, both directly, through the implementation of neoliberal policies that push to the margins the most fragile individuals unable to keep up with the circular movement of production-purchase-consumption, and indirectly by irreversibly defacing the environment in which we live (Ellis, 2020). An interesting synthesis can be found in the words of subject number ten: "The other side, with respect to sustainability, is a bit of consumption without an ethic" (S. 10).

Not a mechanism, but an existence

The environment to which the students interviewed refer does not appear as a mechanical alchemy and the environmental crisis does not assume in their words only the sense of a failure of a mechanism. Environmental balance is described as a process of harmonization that holds together the presence of man, understood as humanity as a whole, with that of other living species and that develops around emotional dimensions:

We live on an earth that is marvelous both from the terrestrial point of view and in the marine world, in everything that surrounds us. Also because, precisely, the earth gives us so much, it doesn't just give us life but also gives us affection and the animal world. (S. 5)

The Millennial students interviewed seem to approach the theme of environmental sustainability outside the metaphor of "repair" that characterizes mainstream public discourse, since they reject the epistemological dimension that underlies it: humanity is connected and is linked to other living creatures and to the earth in the broadest sense; it is not a dominating element. The biosphere is the home in which the concept of humanity itself is built, in the relationship between human beings and in the vital link with other animal and plant realities. The human being, who is the obvious cause of environmental suffering with the behaviors implemented, is not only engaged in "doing" something to restore the lost balance, but in "being" something different, recovering the overall bond with other creatures and with the earth. One can reasonably read in this attitude a first embryonic questioning of the logic of the machine, of the pervasive affirmation of modern rationality that has long since shown its limits (Benasayag, 2019).

Towards a practice of "conversion"

The change in approach highlighted earlier does not represent a renewed environmentalist ideology, but is presented by the interviewees as a framework of meaning within which specific behaviors are placed that involve everyone in a commitment to daily change:

If I think of sustainability I think of a way of doing: it's a way of doing also altruistic, let's say, because you think of the good of other people, the good of future generations. But it is also a way of doing things that is respectful of the environment in which we live and of the surrounding nature, so I also think of actions, of

actions that the individual can do and that, on a collective level, bring about positive change. (S. 5)

The list of possible behaviors aimed at protecting the environment or combating climate change that the interviewees propose is very broad and covers different areas of daily life: styles of consumption in general, with particular emphasis on those related to food and clothing, mobility and transport, savings in daily energy consumption and rather sharp turns towards renewable energy. There are also new aspects that seem to open up very interesting research scenarios, which to date have been little investigated in general (Nelson *et al.*, 2021) and even less so in relation to this age group, such as sustainable tourism and the demand for eco-friendly accommodation.

A further element that, at least in part, links the Millennials interviewed to an attention to the environment centered on the dimension of personal change is the frequent presence in the interviews of the theme of volunteering, both in the specific sense of volunteering with an environmental matrix and, more generally, of the proximity to experiences of volunteering in favor of people and contexts considered most fragile: foreigners and populations of countries with a high poverty index.

Opening up to the other

Environmental sustainability and interculturality converge towards an interesting point of synthesis in the words used in the interview of subject number six: "I actually believe that both terms [sustainability and interculture] start, let's say, from a common base which is that of openness to the other" (S. 6).

Sustainable attitudes towards the environment and openness towards individuals from cultural backgrounds different from our own are based on recognition, attention and respect for others. Po-

sitioning our gaze outside ourselves, attributing to others the very right to live a full existence, recognizing ourselves as part of a "single human family" (Francesco, 2015, n. 52) seem to be the prerequisites for respecting the environment and others. In this way, the double nature of solidarity is realized: in a diachronic sense, through respect for the environment understood as an overall ecosystem, we act in solidarity with future generations; in a synchronic sense, recognizing ourselves through our "common humanity" allows us to welcome others, especially when they reach our territory through complex and dramatic migratory routes.

The words of the students interviewed also show an adequate awareness of the mechanisms of operation of these phenomena, in particular of the close link that exists today between unsustainable behaviors towards the environment and migratory movements of a large portion of humanity. Interviewee number eight expresses the concept in this way:

> In my opinion they have to, there is a need, that [sustainability and interculturality] are reconciled, precisely because I think they are two topics that are absolutely linked, especially for the near future that we might experience. Because of climate change, which will also affect food, probably a lot of people will be forced to migrate, so, as is already happening, but maybe even more so, […] to have to be integrated in whatever place they choose to move to. Probably the way to integrate these two aspects would be to start from ecological, environmental and humanistic policies, for example. The aspects of migration and sustainability, in this sense I see them united. (S. 8)

Even more explicit seems the interviewed number ten:

> I would be inclined to say that [sustainability and interculturality] are linked, that we have to start thinking about it really seriously, because I think this is really the immediate future, because climate change is leading to both desertification and scarcity of raw resources. People who live in certain parts of the planet clearly have as an

alternative to stay still and risk dying or go elsewhere […] I think they are precisely problems that we must start thinking about, in the sense that they are two of the hottest issues that will accompany us in the years to come, climate change and migration. So we should start to act, even if I don't know the solution. (S. 10)

And this awareness is confirmed as a fact that is not only theoretical or ideal, but calls concretely for a change in lifestyle:

Both [environmental sustainability and interculturality] are something that are not to our daily life, we have to change lifestyle, both for environmental and intercultural factor and so having an open mind, changing our habits, definitely facilitates this process, this process of change, yes. So being open to the new, for sure, is one of the influencing factors. (S. 7)

Information

This part of the survey finally allowed for a comparison with the theme of sources of information: in particular, in relation to the age of the population targeted by the research, attention is focused on the new media as places in which a "public space" of engagement on the themes of sustainability and interculturality is constructed (Marini *et al*., 2017).

While there is no lack of references to the family and school (primary and secondary) as places in which an early inculcation to the issues in question takes place, both in terms of values and behaviors, the students interviewed repeatedly cite sources that can be traced back to the web or to pay television platforms, in particular Netflix. Lacking, except in a couple of interviews, are references to more traditional media such as print newspapers and free-to-air television:

The main [source] I always consult is YouTube, because on YouTube I mainly follow some news channels. If you want I'll even give you the names. The one that I follow the most, every day of

the week is called "Breaking Italy", a news channel that every night does 20 minutes/half an hour of news, the ones that are chosen most relevant. Then, even if a little less, more for questions of sustainability, there is another channel called "Link for Universe", which deals mainly with space issues, but also sometimes with aspects of sustainability. Another channel instead is called "Zoo Sparkle" and it really deals with animal issues and sustainability. Then I would say other Facebook and Instagram channels, there more for the news newspaper, so La Stampa, Repubblica the Corriere mainly and then I would say TV no, as a source of information no. (S. 9)

The contents that attract the interest of the young students interviewed range from sustainability in the different industrial productions (fashion, fishing, or means of locomotion) to climate change and its consequences on populations and migratory processes. In particular, the theme of increasing desertification of territories is referred to in several interviews.

An issue that emerges in the background of the interviews in the relationship with the sources and that could be the object of further investigation is the position of users that the young people interviewed have with respect to the themes: none of the eleven interviewees expressed an active participation in the debate, for example through the production of posts or as the owner of specific formats on social media.

Results analysis CES Don Bosco corpus of data, Madrid, Spain

Three topics are dealt with in this first field: conceptual representation of environmental sustainability, attitude to sustainability, assessment of economic development from the human rights perspective.

Concept of environmental sustainability

The conversation key concepts linked to sustainability appear as it follows (in parentheses, there is the participant's number in the transcription of the focus group conversation): *equilibrium*, understood as the symbiotic relationship between nature and humans at different levels, environmental, social, economic, and personal (4); *continuity*, understood as the guarantee of a future for everyone (1); *consumption*, as a contrary, antithetical concept to sustainability (12); *misuse*, in line with the previous concept, the sustainability concept means the exclusion of resource misuse (11).

The terms underline the dual nature of the representation, the projective nature (balance, continuity) and the critical nature (consumption and misuse). Their vision is based on their perception of Earth's limited resources, limited by quantity and time; and the conversion of a natural human quality (habit) into a need (7).

Young people and environmental sustainability

The second topic is about the attitude to sustainability, if they are aware of it, if they are concerned.

Awareness understood in cognitive/informative terms, they assess the degree of awareness as excessive, classifying themselves as "a very aware generation" (1, 8). But as a result of the disassociation between knowledge/information and awareness, "insufficient awareness" (9, 10, 11) is claimed as inconsistent attitudes are adopted (1), such as selfishness and conformity as awareness requirements are deemed to be satisfied by very limited practices. (8, 11) and unawareness of the limitations on the resources the Earth can provide (19).

From a more radical viewpoint, from a more social and less individualist perspective of the representation of sustainability, a

more critical attitude is adopted. Understanding that they participate in the system, they say "we are living in a system that perpetuates continuing as we are and lack of awareness" (10, 11). It is not inconsistency on the part of individuals or groups which determines their attitude, but their belonging to and identifying with a system that determines them.

They also project the same critical attitude with certain specific expressions held to be "trendy" such as participating in a Greenpeace publication or action, as they see big mistakes in them as isolated and uncoordinated actions (9).

More generally, criticism is aimed at the type of consumerist society, participation in that society, expressed in attitudes like "presentism", "attitudes of misuse, undue appropriation", an irresponsible attitude to the Earth's resources. "Food from this year is wasted so it can be consumed next year" (4); "we have usufruct over something which is not at our disposal, because it is not our property: that is the relationship between humans, the environment and natural resources" (4).

Economic progress and human rights

Economic progress and sustainability are perceived as a problematic relationship. That issue has been evident from the start of the pro-sustainability movement when in 1983, the United Nations constituted the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) to prepare a report on environment and the global problematic to the year 2000 and beyond, including proposed strategies for sustainable development (WCED, 1987, p. 1).

The topic of conversation is "perception of the problematic relationship between development and sustainability" from the Human Rights perspective.

Firstly, Human Rights and economic progress are said to be incompatible in the economic/capitalist context; "the value of a thing is its price, a quantitative value" (the higher the value, the higher the price); the value of the individual is reduced to the price of things: just like things, the individual also has a price (10). In contrast, in the context of Human Rights, the nature and value of the individual stems from their dignity, the value of a human being is to be a person (10).

From less radical positions, it is said that "sustainability does not involve renouncing economic progress" (1, 12). In fact, more developed countries respect human rights and the demands of nature. Respect for human rights-economic progress: in fact, human rights are more respected in highly developed countries than in emerging countries, China, India (1).

Going deeper into analysis of the problem and taking sustainability requirements beyond compatibility with Human Rights, it is said there is a need to change the understanding of economic development by replacing rational ethics, which has led to the current situation, with ethics of the heart (12). One expression would be to change co-existence environments, replacing megacities, exponents of purely quantitative rational development. (4), with small cities.

Without going into greater depth, reference is made to major problems that purely economic development poses for sustainability: the relationship between developed countries and poor/developing countries; the problem of waste production/recycling; the problem of immigration: how it is compatible with economic progress, the right to immigration, the right to work for everyone.

Finally, they were asked to assess Agenda 2030, how they see it: they regard it as "a utopian dream in a dystopian future" (10), but they also see it as "feasible" despite the difficulties.

Interculturality

It is as a social phenomenon, is part of the social dimension of sustainability, a society's ability to ensure human well-being, (safety, health, democratic education, participation, justice) equitably distributed among classes and genders. Culture, like the economy, community, technology, is a social subsystem (Parsons, 1976).

The topics for debate regarding interculturality are similar to those for sustainability. Firstly, students' representations of interculturality; secondly, the assessment of interculturality according to the diversity it involves; and thirdly, the experience of interculturality considered from a generational rather than an ethnic perspective.

Intercultural stereotypes: singularity-diversity dialectics

Based on a functional representation of culture as rules for both the individual and the group, basically three representations of interculturality are projected: a dialectical representation, a conflictual representation, and a dynamic-interactive representation.

1. *Dialectical representation*. The dialectical nature stems from the contradiction involved in cultural stereotypes for the individual and for the group in an intercultural context.

Cultural stereotypes within a group involve a contradiction in both the individual and the group. The individual experiences this contradiction firstly by feeling the need to adapt to the group's stereotypes, such as roles or status; but at the same time they feel the need to be assertive from the perspective of their uniqueness.

The same contradiction is felt by the group, because as stereotypes are the means by which the group asserts its identity, they suppress diversity. This dialectical representation gives rise to the problem posed by interculturality: how is it possible for individuals to

adapt to the group without renouncing their uniqueness and how can they preserve in the group the identity conferred upon them by stereotypes as their unity is declared while guaranteeing diversity? (7).

2. *Conflictual representation*. The conflicting nature of a representation arises from the stereotypes which involve intercultural contexts. Stereotypes can be problematic for both the individual and the group. For the individual, because they carry out the same function as the group's prejudices and prior judgments on and rejection of the individual (11). The detrimental function of the stereotype involves hiding the individual in the group, taking away their personality (19). Stereotypes operate as instruments for rejecting the individual in the group. This is what happens to someone with a piercing, which can hinder their access to a job or put them at a disadvantage compared to others (2).

Something similar happens in the relationship of the group and interculturality. The conflictive nature of interculturality is reflected in its antithetic ambivalence for society: different cultures enhance the richness of a group, but make co-existence problematic: Minority cultures give rise to social conflict, such as gangs (1). Conflicts do not only arise from minority group and majority group interaction, but also from interaction between minority groups (1).

3. *Dynamic-interactive representation*. Then again, stereotypes are understood as dynamic-interactive cultural representations. They enable individuals to interact in the group (4). A stereotype, such as a role, is the individual's response to the group's expectations. In certain groups (educators) as the assimilation of a student to a category which can lead to a more personal relationship (12). This stereotype conditions the interaction of the individuals in the group (4).

4. *Valuation: interculturality and diversity*. It is about seeing what interculturality contributes to society: if interculturality is seen as interaction of majority groups and minorities made up of eth-

nic groups different to the majority, cultural diversity is seen as something that enriches a society, it offers the particularities of each group to the entire social group (4), it makes societies more tolerant (9). A consequence is deduced from this complementarity: respect and the non-imposition of one culture over others (9).

5. *Generational experience*. The idea was to see the experience of interculturality in an immediate and general point of reference, accessible to all and not as an experience linked to certain conditions like geographical and spatial conditions during stay in a country other than one's own and with people from other countries. For that reason, if the cultural subject is understood not as an ethnic group but as a generation, the experience of interculturality in the intergenerational experience in the family context becomes the object of conversation.

The emphasis is placed on the factors that introduce intercultural character within a family: technology, forms of co-existence (tolerance, in relation to racism, gender equality, etc.) (4); generational differences (10); intergenerational cultural difference is caused by the varied understanding of family roles within the family (parents and children do not see the role of each progenitor or kinship roles in the same way) (1); origin of cultural differences, everyone's time of life is different, corresponding to two different historic moments (5). It is highlighted that cultural differences do not mean getting rid of/ throwing away other cultures but sharing cultures: firstly, by not recognizing cultural dumps, there are no cultural dumps; and secondly, generational co-existence should be prioritized over family conflict (12).

In some way it can be said that in a micro-cultural context some elements of a macro-culture are reproduced.

Brief conclusions

The focus groups and interviews represented a particularly valuable opportunity for reflection (in groups and by individuals) on the

meanings and insights linked to the proposed themes, generating many reflective aspects that also led to the expression and sharing of some difficulties regarding one's own position. It may be quite obvious that none of the participants expressed a lack of interest in sustainability and interculturality, given the situation, but beyond the social desirability of the themes, they seemed sincerely important in the experiences of the participants, who gave significant testimony in various aspects. This clarification serves to highlight the presence of the two themes in the agendas of our participants, but also the need to continue along this path in order to increase awareness.

Sustainability and interculturality seems to have both social representations. The analysis approach pursued by all researchers involves understanding how to interpret and give meaning to both phenomena. Representation integrated by two types of factors, cognitive ones, mainly from information received and processed and social and interaction factors focused on social elements.

In the representation of environmental sustainability, the content is perceived as being organized in two directions, one projective, i.e. looking to the future, and the other of a critical approach, which privileges criticism of the type of society, strategies adopted to counteract the effects of the economic development model built without taking into account the Earth's resources and the natural quality of human beings.

From the representation of interculturality, a semantic field can be established with key terms such as equality, tolerance, respect, inclusion, equity, interaction, acceptance, difference, coexistence, respect, integration, identity, process, communication, ethnic group, cohesion, recognition, culture, persons, construction and understanding.

In several occasions, the participants mentioned education in sustainability and interculturality to counteract the reproductive na-

ture of the meanings of the society of economic development as a mono- or multi-cultural society based on a particular form of acquiring and communicating knowledge.

The social representations projected in relation to the environment and interculturality shows the correlation between saying and doing in pedagogical practice. It involves training/education based on current problems, considering them and adopting a position on the problems in both fields.

In conclusion, it results particularly relevant and urgent the need to invest further in the themes so as to achieve a real impact on daily practices and, more generally, on lifestyles. We believe that this step is possible both by implementing the training offered in university curricula and by including innovative languages capable of embodying good practices of integral ecology and interculturality.

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Este libro es el producto y la propuesta del quehacer intelectual, de la discusión y la investigación académica, de la preocupación pastoral y educativa de quienes conforman la red académica IUS Education Group de las Instituciones Universitarias Salesianas (IUS EG). Recoge las memorias del VI Seminario del IUS EG, que se llevó a cabo en la Universidad Politécnica Salesiana, sede Quito, del 26 al 28 de abril de 2022. El Seminario —así como su memoria— responde a tres ejes temáticos: "Desafíos educativo-pastorales de la educación superior salesiana en contextos de crisis", "Formas y espacios para la participación juvenil" e "Innovaciones educativas para la educación superior en contextos de frontera". Conferencias magistrales, trabajos de investigación y relatos de experiencia que se presentaron en los paneles y mesas temáticas, conforman esta memoria.

Los enfoques innovadores, enmarcados en el modelo educativo y el carisma salesiano, constituyen una respuesta a los desafíos de la educación superior salesiana en contextos de crisis y abren la discusión para futuras investigaciones del colectivo académico.