

INTER-ALFA PROJECT (2007/2009)
**EURO- LATINAMERICAN POSTGRADUATE PROGRAMME ON
INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION**

NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

Introduction

The INTER-ALFA Project purports to design and elaborate an Euro-Latinamerican postgraduate programme on Intercultural Education. During the first year of the project we will undertake the needs assessment in order to make decisions about the objectives, contents, structure, resources, etc. of the postgraduate programme. Each partner will follow this protocol to prepare a needs assessment report, which will be used to write the general report.

The project promotes a network activity oriented to generate a Euro-latinamerican space where people from the participant institutions would be able to cooperate and accomplish the main objectives of the project.

One of the products of the first year is this Needs Analysis Report. Its aim is to identify training needs in the field of intercultural education in the partner institutions. This analysis has contributed to obtain information about:

- a) Images and concepts about diversity.
- b) Policy and legislation on cultural diversity.
- c) Postgraduate initiatives on intercultural education.

Its general objective has been to collect and analyze meaningful data on the dimensions defined in this protocol, providing an overall picture of the situation, that will allow us to design a Postgraduate programme on Intercultural Education, relevant for the different contexts of the participants.

Each partner has elaborated a local/national Needs Assessment Report according a common protocol provided to serve as guidelines in the data collection. The collected information do not intend to be exhaustive but meaningful for the purpose of the ALFA project.

Needs assessment is a systematic exploration of the way things are and the way they should be. It implies examining the current situation, determining the state of each dimension and identifying the desired conditions taking into account the assumptions and practical implications of the intercultural approach.

The aim of the assessment *is not to elaborate a comparative analysis* of institutions or countries, but to collect relevant information in order to facilitate the decision making with regards to the proposal of a Eurolatinamerican Postgraduate programme on Intercultural Education.

The partial reports developed by each one of the partners has been compiled in this brief global report emphasizing the main contributions of each of them. This report, together with the all partners' individual reports, will allow us to identify priorities and to design a training proposal that meets the needs and expectations of the target groups and the contexts involved.

1. Conditions for implementing the program: how to put the Graduate Degree into practice

1.1. Institutional context: conditions, supports and obstacles

The institutions that form the INTER-ALFA Project share ends and objectives that refer to the internationalization of their activity, interest in training and research on new subjects, support for innovation, and the development of new areas of knowledge that will contribute to achieve equal opportunities for all, as well as the dissemination of this knowledge:

“to establish agreements with international higher education institutions to operate high quality extension graduate programs and allow an exchange of knowledge and experience that will ensure high level specialized training.”¹

For example, as part of the UV's internationalization process, the “establishment of networks and collaboration with institutions in other countries, access to some of their courses and programs, mobility of our professors and students to these institutions, and reciprocal interinstitutional accreditation”² are considered to be primary goals directed toward making

¹Universidad Veracruzana <http://www.uv.mx/> consulted on June 8, 2007.

² Consolidación y Proyección en el siglo XXI (Hacia un Paradigma Universitario Alternativo) Propuesta del Programa de Trabajo 2001-2005 <http://www.uv.mx/> consulted on June 8, 2007.

Mexico's participation in the global arena increasingly competitive; parallel to this interest, the university is strengthening equality in education and attention to diversity.

By creating the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI), the Universidad Veracruzana has extended its presence to areas that have traditionally lacked the attention their cultural characteristics and related needs warrant.

*Objective: To extend the higher education available in the entity in an equitable fashion, ensuring quality and pertinence, and attending to the needs of the intercultural regions of the state of Veracruz.*³

In the case of the University of Limerick (Ireland), the University is committed to providing equal opportunities and opposes all forms of injustice and discrimination, acknowledging the need for affirmative action to promote equality. Among their declarations of intentions, the following can be highlighted:

*The wave of the future is not the conquest of the world by a single dogmatic creed but the liberation of the diverse energies of free nations and free men (J.F. Kennedy)*⁴

Among the objectives of the UNED, the Statutes indicate the objective of “*facilitating access to university teaching and continuity in their education for all people capable of upper-level studies who choose the UNED educational system for its methodology or for work, economic, residence, or any other reason.*”⁵

On the other hand, the Universidad Técnica Particular of Loja (UTPL), located in southern Ecuador, is well-organized for research development, specific policies, and priority lines of research. The Universidad Técnica Particular of Loja (UTPL), a bimodal in-person and open and distance education entity, in addition to training professionals, also undertakes to

³ http://www.uv.mx/programa_trabajo/ejes_rectores/ consulted on June 8, 2007 in Needs Analysis Mexico. 2007

⁴ Kennedy, J.F. Address at The University of California at Berkeley. 1962: Berkeley, in the University of Limerick, Ireland, Needs Assessment Report.

⁵ Article 3. Statutes of the UNED in the Needs Analysis Report UNED-CSIC-UCM.

strengthen their knowledge and their respect for culture and for preserving identity and human values. Its policy regarding cultural diversity is as follows:

- To orient and promote the development of activities that strengthen pluriculturalism.
- To develop programs that include all cultural diversity.
- To organize events oriented to strengthening interculturalism.
- To promote and lead the inclusion of different cultures in university activity.
- To disseminate the cultural manifestations of the different ethnic and cultural groups that exist using the university's different communications media.

The University of Latvia has a Center of Multicultural Education (in the School of Psychology and Psychopedagogy) with the objective of researching and providing academic and professional training in multicultural and bilingual education, improving the status of professors in the Latvian educational system, and promoting the concept of "multicultural" education in Latvia.

These objectives that our institutions share coincide with those of the ALFA-INTER Project and are a strong point for this project's application in the participating institutions. In addition, the majority of the institutions are counting on the use of the new technologies as a formula that will allow them to develop semi-in-person or distance programs that will facilitate access to higher education for all, as well as new experiments in academic collaboration among geographically distant groups, as is the case with the Inter-Alfa project and as should be case for the training program that will result from this project.

In this sense, we should highlight that, in the joint work in the meetings and in the information provided by each institution in the partial needs analysis documents, the need for an open graduate program with a flexible curricular design appears. This curriculum should be adapted to the needs of the potential students and professors who will both be located in different parts of the world and whose needs respond to dissimilar contexts.

Another aspect that the group has considered is the need to decide between two potential demands, one solely related to the educational sphere and another broader one that does not

restrict the subject of diversity to education. In this sense, in the last meeting a proposal was made for the graduate program to be in *Comparative Studies in Interculturality* or in *Intercultural Studies*, which would not exclude the subject of education but would extend the lines of analysis and attention to phenomena associated with diversity. The possibility of emphasizing comparative studies, taking advantage of the multicultural and multidisciplinary character that this program will have is considered to be a rich vein to explore.

The institutional obstacles or weak points for designing and applying the graduate degree derive from the differences regarding the structure of the study plan, and the organization and acknowledgement of the degrees. Thus, we find a range from institutions such as the UNED (Spain), the UVI (Mexico), the Universidad Técnica Particular of Loja (Ecuador), the Universidad of Tarapacá (Chile), as well as the CSIC (Spain) which, by means of an agreement with the Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo can give a graduate degree as their own degree, to the institutions that can do this as transversal modules in different degrees (Limerick, UNT). In this sense, one task will be to find the institutional option that, through agreements, will benefit the kind of graduate degree sought the most, as the heterogeneity of the participating institutions' normative systems has proven to be a possible obstacle. At any rate, we should exploit the positive potential of interinstitutional collaboration when implanting the program. For example, the University of Latvia report mentioned that, even if the implantation of a Master's in intercultural education is coherent with the institutional tradition, there are few scholars specialized in the area and international collaboration could compensate for this fact.⁶

However, at present, designing a program that would share the study plan and professors of all participating institutions, with a European institution and a Latin American institution sharing the coordination so that the degree would be valid on both regions, seems viable.

1.2. General context: specific space, needs not covered

The global opinion derived from the analysis of the partial reports is that graduate programs that adopt an intercultural focus in their design and application do not exist, or are the

⁶ Need Analysis Report – University of Latvia. Page 5

exception. The most frequent types of graduate courses are the ones that include references to intercultural education in their subjects, courses, and modules. Interculturality is associated, in most cases, with the specific educational treatment aimed at indigenous peoples, immigrants, and linguistic minorities. The search for graduate degrees related to the one we have proposed was biased from the start, as we sought to localize graduate programs whose titles were somehow related to cultural diversity.

The majority of the graduate degrees located in the different reports center, in their denomination and contents (subjects, courses, modules), on three ideas: multiculturalism, intercultural bilingualism, development, and social intervention. After that, the most frequently associated concepts are: inclusion, anti-racism, indigenous leadership, language and culture, human rights, migrants and refugees, community education, mediation, democracy and citizenship, and urban conflicts.

The specific proposals for intercultural education are offered mostly as modules or itineraries in broader training programs: for example, the Master's in Education, with a mention in intercultural education (Chile) and the Master's in Education (Univ. Politécnica Salesiana, Ecuador). The University of Nottingham offers modules on cultural diversity associated with courses on citizenship and other social subjects. Some exceptions are the Master's in Intercultural Education (UNED/UVI) and the Master's in Multicultural Education (Univ. of Huelva), which are full two-year graduate degrees.

One relevant distinction for analyzing the graduate programs that have been located is their theoretical or practical nature, distinguishing between theoretical proposals and proposals for social action:

“I would divide the proposals into two groups: the proposals that continue to think that, in this case, diversity, interculturality, and multiculturalism can be dealt with on paper and from paper, as occurs in theoretical work. More programs are guilty of formalism, of a more theoretical kind of treatment, than the approaches that intend to deal with this subject more in terms of social action.” (UVI Interview. Needs Analysis)

The objectives proposed in the revised graduate programs vary regarding their level of specificity, their area of application, and the focus from which they contemplate diversity. Here is a sample of this variety:

- To contribute to the comprehension of intercultural education as a strategy for conflict solving and a stage for building peace.
- To train human resources capable of projecting their knowledge in intercultural education experiences.
- To consolidate a regional network for exchanging experiences in intercultural education.
- To develop technical and conceptual skills for enriching intercultural experiences.
- To promote a critical analysis of the close relationship between what is cultural and what is political in contemporary societies. The subjectivities, corporalities, identities, sexualities, social movements, new technologies, globalization, and geopolitics of knowledge are considered to be central to the field of cultural studies.
- To become familiar with the cultures and philosophical worlds from the perspective of interculturality.
- To become familiar with present-day world reality and the debates in the social sciences.
- To build perspectives of interculturality from and for the spheres of education, health, development, and political power.
- To become familiar with the problems of interethnic relations, collective social identities, ethnic groups, and indigenous peoples.
- To value and preserve identity.
- To bring reality closer.
- Research to improve attention to cultural diversity.
- Respect.
- Enrichment.
- To develop skills for educational intervention.
- Integration.

It would be interesting to consider each of these objectives in order to establish the extent to which we would include them in our proposal or exclude them, and the reasons.

Regarding the reasons and motivations for doing a graduate degree, the interviews and surveys reflected in the partial reports show that there is a high degree of coincidence among the different contexts and institutions. Thus, in the Spanish case, the reasons the students of the Master's in Intercultural Education (2007/2008) gave are:

- interest in broadening knowledge
- to increase my options for entering the job market
- to find a job
- professional prestige
- improve my salary
- professional recycling

In Loja, the reasons for being interested in a graduate degree in intercultural education included:

- It is important to become familiar with new cultures.
- It helps in all kinds of jobs.
- Importance for social development.
- In order to work better as professionals in all fields.
- It is important because it allows us to know how to act in a globalized world.
- It allows us to strengthen our identity.
- It helps us improve our knowledge about the culture we have.

The most valued aspects when it comes to choosing a graduate program are the prestige of the teaching staff and the entity that gives the program. Along with the concrete contents, the students find it valuable when the graduate program offers opportunities to acquire skills for team work (54.9%) and communications skills (47.3%) (UCM). Information regarding the graduate programs offered is preferentially obtained from internet.

3.3. Implications for the design, structure, and positioning of our graduate degree

There is a great deal of interest and, as we understand it, demand, for higher training in subjects that have to do with cultural diversity and its implications. The term “intercultural” is used to name proposals that, from our point of view, are not always congruent with this focus.

It must be made explicitly clear that intercultural is not an adjective (to be applied to school, education, management, mediation...) but rather a view of diversity, a way of understanding it, and a metaphor to express it. The priority of the focus involves acknowledging that everything that is cultural is always present in educational and human experiences, while acknowledging, at the same time, that we do not know how culture manifests itself and how its influence works; we do not know this a priori. This involves avoiding simplistic and biased views of diversity that associate it with categories established a priori; it involves assuming that diversity is complexity and intersubjectivity.

If cultures manifest themselves in interactions among people and if diversity is normality, that is, something that characterizes us all, then one priority of the graduate program will be to value our own diversity, provoking valuable interactions among all the participants. It is not a matter of talking about interculturality, as if it were something outside of ourselves, but of adopting the intercultural focus when we study issues that have to do with diversity and equality in education. It is also important to acknowledge the political component in the way discourse about interculturality is constructed, in order not to leave the transforming potential of this discourse aside.

In this sense, the process of discussion that preparing this global report involves is very valuable and will be useful in the later phases when we specify the curriculum and when the graduate program is implemented.

One priority in the design of the graduate degree will be to make the conditions for giving it flexible, in order to fit them to the conditions of the institutions. Modules can be given by each institution, with the degree given by one or two of the institutions. These options involve seeking mechanisms for collaboration that will allow us to ensure that the graduate program will be acknowledged in both the Latin American and the European contexts, with a design that will allow continuity through to the doctorate.

2. Contents of the Graduate Program

2.1. Images of diversity

From the needs report prepared by each associate, we have prepared a global analysis of images of diversity that are relevant for initiating the graduate program. We have followed the same outline as in the partial reports: What does diversity mean for the associates? What does diversity mean for the possible clients for the graduate degree? These two sections, however, are not static and they mix together.

a) What does diversity mean for the partners?:

The associates generally agree on the diversity focus and on cultural diversity, even if they maintain their own specific aspects. Cultural diversity refers to the strategies carried out by human beings in order to live together and, therefore, they behave according to these strategies and transmit them to their descendants. However, this diversity is dynamic and changing and directly affects individuals (each person him or herself is diverse). Cultural diversity is understood through the idea of difference and its richness; it should not be used to create hierarchies, because it is a matter of different ways of seeing and focusing on things. It is a concept or reality that is easy to work with, although quite complex.

Taking this into account, the majority of the associates have images of diversity that are quite different from the images detected in the possible clients and the need to work to overcome certain stereotypes (for example, diversity associated with certain groups) has been detected. However, it is also true that other associates tend to focus on cultural diversity in a way that is closer to the images that the possible clients have identified: indigenous peoples and immigration. These issues will become relevant when it comes to implementing the graduate program and preparing its contents.

b) What does diversity mean for the possible audiences of the graduate program?:

In this section, there is also broad agreement even though we are in different contexts and countries. Diversity tends to be understood as richness and associated, in an abstract fashion, with positive sets of ideas: contribution, dialogue, plurality, mixture, etc. However, when it is personalized, it does not feel like it belongs to us: it is always the others who are diverse. Culture tends to be seen as something static and cultural diversity is, therefore, understood from the point of view of the difference between static groups (associated with ethnic references) that have different, monolithic cultures, denying the diversity of each individual within these groups. Thus, for example, there are immigrants, indigenous peoples, displaced people, the *travellers*, etc. We can conclude from this, as we have already indicated, that it is always the others who are diverse, people who are, in many cases, victims of processes of marginalization and/or racism, and that, when we talk about these people, we tend to use a kind of paternalism or false tolerance. Our countries, therefore, would not be diverse without these groups. In some cases, the arrival of new populations to the countries has opened up debates on national identity and what it means and is.

This relationship between diversity and certain groups is also detected in the measures that are already in place in the countries and in the opinions given by the people interviewed. For example, in countries with indigenous populations, people speak about bilingual intercultural programs, clearly alluding to the indigenous populations and the conservation of their languages. In other countries, when people talk about diversity (focusing now on educational contexts) and attention to diversity, they talk about measures directed specifically toward the immigrant population or toward children with special educational needs (physical and/or psychological deficiencies, curricular gaps, etc.). In fact, one of the associates asked about the interest there might be in doing a Master's in Intercultural Education, and of the people interviewed who expressed interest, over half alluded to the increase in immigration as the main reason. So we are faced with a "homogenization" of diversity. We must also say that these measures are, in many cases, implemented as necessary measures to solve "problems"; we find that diversity is, in fact, being *turned into a problem* when it is perceived to be close.

Diversity is also associated with political, social, gender, religious, and other differences but, once again, it is the people who do not share what the majority consider "normal" who are diverse (homosexuality, the dominant religion in the country, etc.).

2.2. Educational policy and legislation

The international political-legislative framework offers numerous examples of references to cultural diversity and intercultural education. The analysis carried out by the associates mentions declarations, reports, sentences, recommendations, and agreements that are international, European, or Latin American, that support and promote the consideration of cultural diversity as a source of richness and intercultural education as a strategy to understand it and address it. The national policies analyzed are, in general, congruent with the international principles and recommendations: *diversity* is acknowledged to be a *value*, although there are important shortcomings and limitations that we will point out.

The first limitation refers to the fundamentally declarative and rhetorical natures of the subscription to these international principles. The pluricultural composition of the states is commonly acknowledged explicitly; however, *tensions* are noted between the acknowledgement of diversity and the defense of national “unity” or of national culture, as well as *ambiguities* regarding what this pluricultural composition is, what the common space of “national” or “cultural” unity is, and what the “links of identity” that can reinforce this national unity are.

On the other hand, the analysis of educational policy in the different countries and contexts dealt with by the associates shows that, in the legislative sphere, diversity refers almost exclusively to specific groups: *it is “the others” who are diverse*. In the Latin American sphere, diversity is related to *ethnic groups* and *indigenous populations*; legislation is enacted to promote “bilingual intercultural education,” which translates into “special” educational practices for these groups. Despite some examples of a changing tendency in this sense, such as the inclusion of interculturality as a transversal axis in the Ecuatorian educational system or the consideration of intercultural education “for all the population” in Mexico by the General Coordination Team for Intercultural and Bilingual Education, there is clearly a tremendous amount of work to be done regarding raising the consciousness and increasing the involvement of “majority” peoples and groups: the only individuals and groups who feel

concerned and involved in respecting and valuing cultural diversity are the indigenous groups themselves.

In Europe, the diverse “others” are basically the “*immigrants*,” classified as such together with the students with *special educational needs*. It is interesting to point out that, while Latin American legislation habitually uses the term “intercultural education,” in Europe it is hard to find legislative references that use this term.⁷ When they prepared the analysis, the associates chose the terms that they considered to be related to what is intercultural, involving an inevitable bias in the study. These terms tend to be related to “compensatory education,” “education for immigrants or minority groups,” or, in somewhat more positive terms, to the ideas of “inclusion” and “equal opportunities.”

In general, the image of diversity offered by different educational legislation and norms implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, involves the *idea of deficit and/or problem*, as well as a specific or compensatory treatment. On the other hand, the distance between declarations and practice, despite the progress registered in terms of legislative development, is still very large. One of the main issues of the different reports prepared by the associates is related to the need for change, for a profound transformation of educational structures, as the present-day ones do not allow the acknowledgement of diversity: “it is necessary to build a new pedagogical rationality, as well as a new institutional architecture. This will allow us to have a school that thinks about and attends to all the differences.”⁸ The teachers are an important factor for this transformation, so training teachers in the intercultural focus is marked as a priority in several reports.

One aspect that should be highlighted is that all educational legislation attaches a great deal of importance to *language as a cultural factor*. Language is used to define who is diverse, and it is considered a priority element in educational action. However, just as with national identity, unresolved tensions can be observed in the way language is dealt with in education. The diglossic positions holds sway: there is an official language, the “vehicular” language in school, and if minority languages are respected and maintained, it is as a sign of group

⁷ There are some exceptions, for example, the promotion of “intercultural dialogue” in Latvia expressed in the *Declaration of the Intended Activities of the Cabinet of Ministers (2007)*, page 10.

⁸ Needs Analysis Report of Mexico, p. 33

identity. Bilingualism is valued as an orientation toward learning an internationally dominant language, such as English. On occasion, legislation is ambiguous; in the case of Latvia, for example, the ethnic groups' right to be educated in their native language is recognized, but on the other hand, the "national language as a symbol of the state and an instrument of integration into society" is emphasized.⁹

Another aspect worth mentioning refers to the *fight against racism and discrimination* taken up by the different legislations. In Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Latvia, explicit reference is made to "anti-racist education" linked to inter- or multicultural education. In Mexico, a specific organism, CONAPRED, has been created to prevent discrimination, and it has begun a survey on discrimination in school.

2.3. Implications of the analysis of the contents of the graduate program

In this section, we must consider that some associates have pointed out that, in order for the Master's to be implemented successfully in their respective countries, it will be necessary to follow the interests that the study of the images of diversity has shown. Nevertheless, and disregarding the particular aspects that each associate will specify in their own design, points of agreement have been detected:

- Diversity should be *de-essentialized, de-homogenized, and de-problematized*.
- All the participants in the graduate program must be made sensitive to the fact that diversity is something that affects us all as individuals, and they must see themselves as diverse.
- We must be coherent with the diversity focus itself, assuming that it is complex and does not require simple solutions. Similarly, we must work with specific definitions that will avoid misunderstandings.
- A comparative focus with other realities and other national and international contexts should be included.
- Trans- and inter-disciplinary work is required. It should not be reduced to contents in education.

⁹ Need Analysis Report – University of Latvia. Pages 15 and 16

- Subjects such as racism and cultural relativism should be explored in depth, working with the richness that diversity means and with the acceptance of diversity.
- The title and dissemination strategy of the graduate program should be clear in order to attract professionals from different areas. The idea we had was: “Intercultural Studies” as one possibility.
- The methodology should be predominantly practical, based on the social construction of knowledge, on the interaction of the student with his or her own diversity and that of others.

The analysis of the policies carried out by the associates led us to draw two conclusions that are complementary to the previous ones:

- On one hand, we saw that, despite the undoubted progress of legislation regarding the acknowledgement and valuing of diversity, “there is still a lot left to do” to put these principles into practice and to transform practice. As the report prepared by the UVI pointed out, the policies “fail to come down to earth.” One factor that influences this lack of practical concreteness is related to the absence of participative processes: the laws are made and promoted vertically, from top to bottom, and therefore they do not generate consciousness and involvement in society. It is, therefore, necessary to work to turn the pyramid upside down, and this translates into *building citizenship*. The issue of citizenship and the generation of participative political processes, and the inquiry into the construction of “public space” are subjects that our graduate program should take on.
- On the other hand, once again according to the UVI report, the legislative development that is favorable to valuing diversity and to promoting intercultural education, despite its limitations, allows us to see legislation as a *space of possibilities*: thanks to the declarations of principles, it is possible to find references to use and to take advantage of the cracks in the system in order to introduce transformations in the direction of interculturality.

Other important issues to consider for preparing the contents of the graduate program are related to different subjects that have already been mentioned: racism and discrimination, the

educational and social treatment of languages, tensions between globalization and localisms, tensions between the political State and the nation, and issues regarding identity.