MOBILITIES, COMMUNICATION AND INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION:
CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL CHALLENGES

MOBILIDADES, COMUNICAÇÃO E EDUCAÇÃO INTERCULTURAL:
DESAFIOS GLOBAIS CONTEMPORÂNEOS

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Abstract: Migrations, interculturalism and digital and intercultural communication are domains heavily present in the social and political discourses of the last and first decades of the 20th and 21st century, respectively, at the level of various sectors, and in the communication, intercultural and educational paradigms nowadays. Cultural diversity, a multicultural and network society, the Internet, the development of digital information and communication technologies, the inclusion of these technologies in education and teaching gave origin to new forms of relationship, communication and learning. They also gave origin to major changes in society and social organisations, particularly in education, environments where interculturalism and student mobility have been increasing. In this article, some of these questions will be discussed, which are raised in a contemporary framework, and we will also analyse policies, strategies and competences which may help professionals who work with migrants, refugees and ethnic/cultural minorities to better interact with this population, fostering their welcoming and social inclusion as well as promoting coexistence, communication and intercultural education, and the development and wellbeing of everybody, regardless of their cultural or social origin.
Keywords: Migrations. Interculturalism. Communication and intercultural education. Intercultural competences. Digital communication.

Resumo: As migrações, o interculturalismo e a comunicação digital e intercultural são domínios fortemente presentes nos discursos sociais e políticos das últimas e primeiras décadas do século XX e XXI, respetivamente, ao nível de vários setores, e nos paradigmas comunicacionais, interculturais e educativos da atualidade. A diversidade cultural, a sociedade multicultural e em rede, a Internet, o desenvolvimento das tecnologias digitais de informação e comunicação, a inserção dessas tecnologias na educação e no ensino deram origem a novas formas de relacionamento, comunicação e aprendizagem. Também deram origem a grandes mudanças na sociedade e nas organizações sociais, em particular na educação, ambientes onde a interculturalidade

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e a mobilidade estudantil têm vindo a aumentar. Neste artigo serão discutidas algumas destas questões que se colocam no contexto contemporâneo, sendo também analisadas políticas, estratégias e competências que possam ajudar os profissionais que trabalham com migrantes, refugiados e minorias étnicas/culturais a melhor interagir com este população, promovendo o seu acolhimento e inclusão social, bem como promovendo a convivência, a educação e comunicação intercultural e o desenvolvimento e bem-estar de todos, independentemente da sua origem cultural ou social.

Palavras Chave: Migrações. Interculturalismo. Educação e comunicação intercultural. Competências interculturais. Comunicação digital.

Resumen: Las migraciones, la interculturalidad y la comunicación digital e intercultural son dominios que están fuertemente presentes en los discursos sociales y políticos de la última y primera década de los siglos XX y XXI, respectivamente, a nivel de diversos sectores, y en las corrientes comunicacionales, interculturales y educativas. paradigmas. La diversidad cultural, la sociedad multicultural y en red, Internet, el desarrollo de las tecnologías digitales de la información y la comunicación, la inserción de estas tecnologías en la educación y la enseñanza dieron lugar a nuevas formas de relación, comunicación y aprendizaje. También dieron lugar a cambios importantes en la sociedad y las organizaciones sociales, particularmente en la educación, entornos donde la interculturalidad y la movilidad estudiantil han ido en aumento. En este artículo, se discutirán algunos de estos temas que surgen en el contexto contemporáneo, así como políticas, estrategias y habilidades que pueden ayudar a los profesionales que trabajan con migrantes, refugiados y minorías étnicas/culturales a interactuar mejor con esta población, promoviendo su aceptación e inclusión social, así como promover la convivencia, la comunicación intercultural y el desarrollo y bienestar de todos, independientemente de su origen cultural o social.

Palabras clave: Migraciones. Interculturalidad. Educación y comunicación intercultural. Habilidades interculturales. Comunicación digital.

1 INTRODUCTION

The current social context of increasing human mobility and globalisation, open and networked, is characterised by more intense and diverse flows of migration and refugees and by new arrangements and changes in the domain of communication, which derive from the development and diversity of communication and technological resources and also from an increase in intercultural contacts and coexistence with cultural diversity. This context contributes to reinforce multiculturalism in societies and the complexity of communication and interpersonal, intergroup, communicational and intercultural relationships. In fact, multiculturalism, within the meaning of the coexistence of various different cultures and ethnicities in the same society, and intercultural contact, that is to say the meeting of people and groups which are different from a cultural, ethnic or language point of view, are elements which increasingly characterise national and global social fabrics, and pose a variety of challenges, questions and representations at both an individual and collective level.

Globalisation, urbanisation and migrations have increased spatial, territory and identity movements and changes, as well as intercultural contacts, contributing to intensify these contacts and the transnationality of societies and to blur borders. Human mobility e cultural diversity is considered to be symbols of contemporaneity, modernity, globalisation and ur-

banisation, in addition to being fundamental elements for social transformation, for human and cultural development and improvement, and for the global economy (PNUD, 2004, 2009; CASTLES, 2010; RAMOS, M.C., 2020; RAMOS, 2020). Migrations and interculturalism are expressions of this mobility and multiculturalism, which have been shaped from different factors, motivations and contexts, and affect the various continents, genders, social classes and generations, as well as the various domains of public and private sphere, representing one of the great global and societal challenges of our times.

The valorisation of international cooperation and cultural and commercial exchanges, new forms of qualified and student mobility, transnational networks, new means for communication (the media, the Internet), ease of travel and rapid means of transport and new migratory arrangements have contributed to an increase in the multi/interculturalism and complexity of contemporary societies and in interpersonal and intergroup relationships. In respect of migration, the growing gap between levels of development and between demographic structures of rich and poor countries, the increase in environmental catastrophes, the political, ethnic, religious and armed conflicts and globalisation have given rise to an increasing number of individuals and groups displaced at national and international level and in intercultural contact.

Therefore, migrations have been increasing: whether they are permanent migrations (people who settle definitively in another country or region), temporary migrations (moving to another country for a short amount of time, for example international personnel or students), or even forced or non-voluntary migrations (refugees or asylum-seekers). These migratory and intercultural movements pervade everyday social life and the various sectors, the relationships between individuals, groups, cultures and States and give rise to changes, interculturalism and collaborations in the countries of departure and arrival and within the global and European contexts.

The cultural diversity reinforced by these mobilities growingly permeates all the domains of public sphere and must be considered, as pointed out by UNESCO (2001) in Article 3 of its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, "[…] one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence".

The importance of multi/interculturalism was reinforced in 2013 by UNESCO when it stressed that in a world that is culturally diverse, it is necessary to develop new approaches and competences, in which the awareness to understanding communication and cultural codes is of paramount importance for overcoming cultural stereotypes and prejudices and for promoting intercultural dialogue.

The challenges of the intercultural domain imply learning to live and work with others and require competences of a psychological, social, cultural, pedagogical, technological and communicational nature, based on the experience of alterity and diversity and on the balance between the universal and the singular. Intercultural encounters are built from the

subjective relationships that each one develops with his culture(s), but also from the inter-actions and communication between individuals and groups. In this respect, the Council of Europe (2001) stressed the need to prevent the dangers and conflicts which may derive from marginalising those who do not have competences for living and communicating in a multicultural, interactive, global and networked world. In a network society (CASTELLS, 1999) characterised by cultural diversity and dominated by media and technology, multi/in-tercultural and digital exclusions represent fundamental exclusions which affect integration, intercultural relationships and the opportunities for education and future of individuals and groups, both migrant and national.

The meeting of cultures is included in a movement of coming to terms with alterity and is a source of improvement, development and creativity, but it is likewise a source of crises, conflicts, difficulties of adaptation, stress, inequalities, exclusions, prejudices and stereotypes within the social and professional context.

Many authors and international organizations emphasise the need for adequate pol-icies for the social, cultural and educational integration of citizens and communities in the various sectors of society. They also warn of the importance for professionals in the dif-ferent domains to be aware of the impact of their discriminatory stereotypes, prejudices and behaviours in communication, and to take into account the individual, social, cultural and educational diversity in their professional practice, as well as to undergo training and develop competences in the communication and intercultural domains (SUE *et al.,* 1992; COHEN-ÉMERIQUE, 1993, 1999; BRISLIN *et al.*,1994; TOMLINSON-CLARKE, 2000; CE, 2001, 2008; RAMOS, 2007, 2008a,b, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2017; STUART, 2004; WADE, 2005; ROGERS-SIRIN, 2008; SPITZBERG, 2009; PAILLARD, 2011; BENNETT, 2013; BERRY, 2017; SZŰCS, 2017; UNESCO, 2001, 2013, 2020).

Likewise, the American Psychological Association emphasises the importance of in-cluding the issues of multi/interculturalism and diversity in training, research, professional practice and organisational change, in addition to the need for producing theoretical and conceptual fundamentals and relevant empirical research in this domain, within the scope of psychology and also in related disciplines, which will justify and provide support to the guid-ance and interventions of a multi/intercultural nature in the different sectors of intervention (APA, 2003).

The European Community recommends that higher education institutions should de-velop and implement global internationalization strategies as an integral part of their overall mission and functions. Increased student and faculty mobility, the international dimension of curricula, the international experience of universities, mastery of foreign languages and intercultural skills, the transnational offer of courses and degrees, and international alliances must become indispensable components of higher education in and outside Europe. The EC also recommends that educational institutions should introduce and promote transdis-

ciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, helping students to develop their open-mindedness and their entrepreneurial and innovative spirit.

The processes of globalisation, population mobility, internationalisation of higher education, digital technologies and use of the Internet have contributed to the development of information and communication, circulation of people, capital and technologies and exchange of knowledge, and to the creation of intercultural and network societies and schools, also posing challenges at different levels, particularly to professionals, to processes and styles of communication and learning, and to teachers and educational institutions, which must rethink their aims and role in the production of knowledge, organisation of curricula, professional training and the promotion of new competences, particularly at the level of teachers and students (CASTELLS, 1999; MORAN, 2001; SOBRAL, 2012; RAMOS, 2007, 2009, 2011, 2016, 2021; DEARDORFF, 2008; UNESCO, 2020).

The management of mobilities and intercultural relationships, as well as the welcoming and integration of migrants and refugees in the receiving societies, pose challenges at a psychosocial, intercultural, communication, socio-economic, educational, sanitary and political level, in addition to multiple questions to societies, States, competences and strategies and policies in the various sectors, which have been at the centre of the concern of numerous countries, governments, national and international agencies, professionals and researchers.

2 MOBILITIES AND INTERCULTURALISM IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD

In the present open and global world, human mobility, both voluntary and forced, migration and exile have increased and become more diverse, especially in the latest decades, contributing not only to a growth in the number of migrants and refugees, intercultural contacts, cultural diversity and assertion of identities, but also to the complexity and increase in communicational and intercultural relationships and intercultural coexistence.

According to data of the World Migration Report, in 2021 there were 281 million international migrants, that is to say the equivalent to 3.6% of world population (UN), which represents a significant increase in this international mobility in comparison to 2000, a period in which they were 173 million, i.e. 2.8% of world population, and to the decade of 1970, when the total of international migrants was only 2.3% of world population. In the European Union (EU), according to the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), there has also been an increase in illegal migration, with approximately 200,000 cases recorded at the EU external borders in 2021, which is a 57% increase in relation to 2020 and 38% in relation to 2019.

In 2018, there were 70.8 million displaced people in the world, due to conflicts, persecutions, violence and the violation of human rights, the majority of these individuals being in need of humanitarian aid and international protection, among them 25.9 million being refu-

gees and 3.5 million asylum-seekers (ACM, 2019). In 2020, according to UN data, 40.5 million people were accounted as having been forced to migrate, against 31.5 in 2019, which shows an increase in this forced migration population.

In international mobility, it can also be seen that among the international migrants, about half are women (47.9%), the feminisation of migrations being one of the characteristics of contemporary migration (IOM, 2020). Actually, the number of migrant women slightly exceeded the number of men under the same conditions in Europe, North America and Oceania in 2020. These international migrants are mainly included in the active age groups, 73% of them being between 20 and 64 years old.

Portugal is included in this global phenomenon related to international mobility and there is evidence in the most recent years – 2019 and 2020 – of an increase in the entry and residence of foreign nationals in Portugal. The number of foreign nationals residing in Portugal reached 590,348 in 2019 (representing 5.7% of resident population in this country) and 662,095 in 2020 (6.4% of total population), the majority of this foreign population belonging to the youngest age groups, of reproductive age and active age. At the level of foreign nationalities, there have been some recent changes, particularly associated with an increase in nationals from some European Union/EU countries (for example Italy, France and the United Kingdom) and Asia (for example China), and also with a decrease in some nationalities of the Portuguese-speaking countries and Eastern Europe.

The reasons for the entry of foreign nationals in Portugal in 2019 were essentially associated with studying (46.6% of visas), family reunification (24.5% of visas) and retirement (14% of visas). In the same year, there was likewise an increase in applications for international protection (1,272 applications in 2018 and 1,849 in 2019). In 2020, the reasons for the entry of foreign nationals in Portugal continued to be mainly associated with studying (53.6% of visas), family reunification (21.6% of visas) and retirement (12.8% of visas) (OLIVEIRA, 2021).

In respect of the feminisation of migrations in Portugal, in 2019 the trend of the previous years was reversed, meaning that men slightly exceeded women in the whole of foreign residents (in 2017, women represented 51.2%, shifting to 50.6% in 2018 and 49.8% in 2019). In this country, foreign nationals are responsible for an increase not only in the number of young people and active workers, but also in that of births, contributing for the balance of Portuguese birth rates and demography. In 2019, the women of foreign nationality accounted for 12.7% of total live births in Portugal, and in 2020 for 13.5%. In recent years, the number of mixed marriages and marriages between foreign nationals has also increased in this country, with a significant increase in these marriages, for example between 2011 and 2019 (plus 17.9% and plus 79%, respectively), contrary to the decreasing evolution of marriages between Portuguese nationals in the same period (less 7.7%), (OLIVEIRA, 2020, 2021).

Also, during these last years, the programmes for attracting international students to higher education have contributed to an increase in the migration flows of foreign students at different levels of higher education in the countries of the OECD, the number of foreign students, or students with international mobility, in higher education having increased 4.8% annually on average between 1998 and 2018 (OECD, 2020). Although the OECD countries host the vast majority of foreign students or students with international mobility, the greatest increase is that of the number of students in international mobility in countries which do not belong to the OECD. In the years 2020 and 2021, the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic affected the international mobility of students, but did not reduce it as much as expected due to access to technologies, the internet and online and remote teaching (UNESCO, 2020b; XIONG *et al*., 2020; RAMOS, 2021; RAMOS; LOPES, 2021; WATERS, 2021).

According to the data of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2020), approximately 5 million students participate every year in international mobility programmes and it is expected that 8 million of young people will be involved in these programmes in 2025.

In the training and development of higher education students, adherence to mobility and internationalization processes, namely in terms of mobility programs such as the ERASMUS programme, has been very important. Mobility implies a personal motivation, learning and exercising openness to constant changes and an opportunity to develop the skills and competences needed today to learn to live and communicate in a world characterized by mobility and cultural diversity, both for the individual and for the society.

During the last 30 years, for example in the EU, the ERASMUS programme, created in 1987, has supported millions of students, trainees and volunteers, providing opportunities for youth education, training, internship, voluntary work and exchange and also playing an important role in social inclusion, such as in the integration and training of young refugees and migrants.

In fact, the creation of the European Higher Education Area set in motion new challenges and goals for universities and for Europe, which influenced other parts of the world. The Bologna process, which was put in action in the European Union (EU) in 1999 to align its university systems and assert their quality and competitiveness within the global context, has tried to develop activities and initiatives to meet the educational needs of a globalised and multicultural world.

For UNESCO, mobility and internationalisation in higher education constitute a means for young people to be able to develop a greater awareness of the world, in addition to prepare themselves to live and communicate in a multicultural and interdependent world.

As regards this student mobility in Portugal, it must be pointed out that in the last decade there was a significant increase in the number of foreign students in the Portuguese higher education system. In the academic year 2019/2020, there were 62,690 foreign students enrolled in higher education, almost tripling the number of students enrolled at the

beginning of the decade (academic year 2010/2011). This increase had an impact on the importance of students in the Portuguese higher education system, with foreign students representing 16.5% of total students enrolled in higher education in 2019/2020, against only 3.3% of total students enrolled in this education level in the year 2000/2001. It should be noted that in the academic year 2019/2020, the Portuguese higher education system included students of 172 nationalities, 58.3% of them being nationals of Portuguese-speaking countries (CPLP), with the students coming from the European Union making up the second largest group, representing 28.3%.

This trend of increase in the number of foreign students has likewise been seen in the elementary and secondary education levels. In the academic year 2019/2020, there were 68,018 pupils of foreign nationalities enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in Portugal (representing 6.7% of total pupils enrolled in these education levels), an increase of 15,377 pupils in relation to the previous academic year, with greatest impact in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and the Algarve (OLIVEIRA, 2021).

Migration processes and intercultural relationships are accompanied by social representations, images and perceptions which vary according to time and space and are influenced by cultural, socio-economic, ideological and political concerns and projections. For example, in the EU countries changes have occurred over the years in the perceptions of the residents in European countries in relation to what they consider to be the impact of immigration. Special Eurobarometer 469 (2018) reported that four out of ten people surveyed considered the immigration of people born outside the EU28 more of a problem than an opportunity (38%) and only one fifth (20%) perceived immigration as an opportunity, Portugal being included in this second group (32%).

In the European Values Study, which analyses values in Europe, the opinion of the people surveyed was also analysed as to the perception of immigration as a factor of country development, Portugal appearing in the most recent survey (2017/2019) in the group of countries which consider immigration as a "good" or "very good" factor for this country's development, with approximately half of the people surveyed having answered favourably (48%), contrary to 14% who consider immigration as "bad" or "very bad" (RAMOS; MAGALHÃES, 2020).

In respect of the perception as to the entry of people from other countries, the "European Social Survey" (ESS) also confirmed that between 2002 and 2018, the majority of Europeans gradually tended to become more favourable about the effects of immigration and it was ascertained that countries such as Portugal, which tend to associate with more favourable perceptions of immigration, are also those which value most the development of policies for the integration of immigrants.

Some negative perceptions, attitudes and social representations in respect of emigration/immigration and emigrants/immigrants are influenced by ignorance, lack of information and education, misconceptions, myths, stereotypes and prejudices, and are a source

of discriminatory behaviours, misunderstanding, tensions and communication problems in relation to this population, when a migrant or refugee may be considered as a threat, a stranger, someone "else" who has to be excluded or eliminated. In fact, facing alterity, intercultural encounters and the relationships between ourselves and the other person are influenced by social representations, ethnocentrism, stereotypes and prejudices, which constitute barriers and "cultural filters" that give origin to conflicts, fear, discrimination and misunderstanding between minority and majority groups (LADMIRAL & LIPIANSKY, 1992; COHEN-ÉMERIQUE, 1993; RAMOS, 2001, 2003, 2009, 2010, 2014; MOSCOVICI, 2005; BERRY, 2017; VERKUYTEN, 2018).

3 INTERCULTURAL PARADIGM AND INTERCULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL DYNAMICS

The understanding and management of migrations and of multi/interculturalism imply a methodological, epistemological and ethical paradigm and repositioning (RAMOS, 2008a, 2010, 2011, 2013) at the level of intervention, research and training, based on three structuring perspectives:

a) *conceptual:* cultural differences are defined not as objective elements of a static nature, but rather as dynamic and interactive entities which mutually give meaning to one another. The intercultural approach is another means for analysing cultural diversity, not starting from cultures taken as independent and homogenous entities, but from processes and interactions instead.

b) *methodological:* the intercultural approach is defined as global, plural, multidimensional and interdisciplinary, in order to take account of the dynamics and complexity of social phenomena and avoid categorisation processes. For the researcher/player, this is a matter of becoming familiar with the social and cultural domain in which he is working, understanding the representations which animate it and asking himself questions for reflecting not only on the culture of the other person, but also, first and foremost, on his own culture.

c) *ethical:* the purpose of an intercultural perspective is to acquire knowledge on cultures, but especially on the relationship between them and the other person, which implies an attitude of decentring. This attitude involves a reflexion on how to respect individual, social and cultural diversity, harmonising what is universal with what is particular, what is global with what is local, and adapting to the structural complexity of a society and its conflicts and changes.

Whatever the domain of intervention may be, professionals have more frequently been meeting in their practice people who are born and grow up between different cultures, and who live in mobility and interculturalism contexts. This situation leads professionals to question themselves about: the influence of cultural dimension on individuals, their development, education and wellbeing; the unity and diversity of human beings and the importance

of universality and/or relativity in psychic and cultural structure formation; the relationship with alterity; the complexity of acculturation and psychosocial adaptation processes deriving from intercultural contact; and the identification of the psychological mechanisms used by individuals for managing the difficulties and problems caused by change and cultural adaptation.

Currently, there is a growing concern at the fact that the offices and professionals who welcome and provide care to culturally different individuals and groups face increasing difficulties in view of this cultural diversity and because they lack the competences for meeting their specific needs. Therefore, there is a greater need for the training of professionals, particularly for the purpose of preparing them to manage intercultural issues, to take into account the relationship between culture and psychism, between culture, communication and education, between migration, acculturation and interculturalism, as well as the importance of culture and cultural changes in understanding the development and functioning of individuals and in their psychological, identity and social reorganisations. This training should provide a level of analysis and intervention which takes into account the singularity of the individual, but inserted in his ecological-cultural context and in one or more cultural contexts, which refer to multiple and complex questions of adaptation, communication, belonging and identity (BERRY, 1997, 2017; BOURHIS *et al.*, 1997; SMITH *et al.,* 2001; RAMOS, 2003, 2004, 2006; WARD and GEERAERT, 2016; VERKUYTEN, 2018).

Some experts and international agencies acknowledge the need to take into account, in professional practice in the various sectors, the individual, social, cultural and educational diversity of beneficiaries and the implementation of training programmes which include cultural and communicational contents and develop intercultural competences from an early stage, in the initial or continuous training of the different professionals (SUE, 2001; TOMLIN-SON-CLARKE, 2000; CE, 2001, 2008; RAMOS, 2001, 2004, 2008a,b, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2020b; APA, 2003; RIDLEY *et al*., 2003; WADE, 2005; WEAVER, 2008, SPITZBERG *et al.,* 2009; PAILLARD, 2011).

The presence, in the different social, educational and health services, of a growing number of individuals coming from various cultural worlds may give rise, for institutions, professionals and said multicultural population, to a variety of problems and conflicts, which may appear as difficulties in communicating and understanding, namely language difficulties, different values, behaviours and habits, and relationship, stress and anxiety problems. This situation requires receptivity, empathy and training for welcoming the other person and for understanding the differences, be they cultural, social, religious, gender or other; it implies developing interventions, integrating and appreciating the social and ecological-cultural contexts of individuals, as well as their social and cultural representations; it undertakes providing opportunities for contacting with the culture of origin, religion and history, aiming at the preservation of their culture of origin and the development of their ethnocultural identity; it requires encouraging the appreciation of different cultures, avoiding stereotypes, prejudic-

es, ethnocentric, discriminatory and racist attitudes; it requires creating relationships based on empathy, respect, trust, dialogue, responsibility and willingness; it implies increasing the consistent training of professionals in different domains and sectors of intervention, in the matters of psychosocial, cultural and identity issues, education and intercultural communication and intercultural competences.

The adequate training of professionals within this scope may likewise help reduce communicational, social and cultural barriers in migration and intercultural contexts, as well as to take into account not only cultural identities and references, which may be plural and from which individuals are structured, but also the psychological, communicational and intercultural processes that they activate to cope with adaptation, acculturation and educational situations.

Intercultural relationships imply asymmetrical relationships between majority and minority groups, sometimes leading professionals, particularly teachers, to assess the culture of others through a prioritisation of the cultures presently involved, in which the culture of professionals serves as a reference and is considered to be superior. This situation requires, on the one hand, a reflection by professionals on the relationships that they maintain with the individuals and groups with whom they work, particularly their relationships and attitudes in relation to difference and, on the other hand, that they question themselves as cultural individuals about their representations, systems of values and social, family and education models, which may interfere in the relationship with the other person, in facing alterity, with cultural diversity and in professional practice.

This attitude and reflection are indispensable when intervening in educational and intercultural contexts, so that professionals may reflect on the impact of their representations and ideologies and of their reactions in view of alterity (DEVEREUX,1992; RAMOS, 2010); to enable them to decentre from their own role models, accept the other person, the alterity, the diversity of pupils/students/beneficiaries and take precautions against ethnocentrism and stereotypes which prejudice the relationship and communication with this other person; and not to confine themselves to a representation of others that is stereotyped, rooted in prejudice, undervalued, globalising, simplified or idealised, which will interfere in the relationship established and work carried out with them.

National and international research, as well as experts, recognise the importance of developing specific training, integrated and multidimensional within the intercultural scope at the level of professionals, in particular teachers/educators, and adequate public strategies and policies. This training is all the more important because various studies have evidenced that professionals, namely teachers, who do not have competences for working with individuals coming from different cultural worlds, face difficulties of various types and frequently show dissatisfaction, demotivation and ethnocentric and inappropriate behaviour.

Whatever the domain of intervention may be, professionals, especially teachers/educators, are more and more frequently meeting, in their practice, young people who were

born and grow up between different cultures, who live in contexts of mobility and interculturalism. Teachers and international students face cultural norms, customs, languages and values different from theirs, with varied and differentiated communicational and educational methodologies, which require specific training and the development of certain competences, values, attitudes, strategies and policies. The presence, for example, in educational facilities of a growing number of young people coming from different cultural worlds may cause to learning institutions, teachers and students, a variety of problems and conflicts which may be expressed through pedagogical, relationship, communication and comprehension difficulties, a situation which requires the adequate training of teachers, students and managers.

Training in the field of intercultural communicational competences should be a part of the training component of professionals, particularly of teachers, so that they may be culturally competent, intercultural mediators and facilitators, promotors of an inclusive and equitable pedagogy, capable of guiding and managing the learning of pupils and students coming from various cultural worlds, providing them with competences, attitudes and knowledge for the understanding of alterity and relationships between cultures, for living and communicating in a world that is culturally diverse, interactive and in mobility (RAMOS, 2003, 2007, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2020, 2021; DEARDORFF, 2006, 2009; SPITZBERG & CHANGNON, 2009).

4 COMMUNICATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES

In order to prepare professionals in the field of intercultural relationships, several programmes have been developed for the acquisition and training of competences. These competences imply that in a context of cultural, social and pedagogical-educational diversity, individuals have awareness, capability and technical skills which will enable them to put their awareness and knowledge into practice in their pedagogical and intercultural relationships and make themselves understood at a communicational and relational level in the various sectors and levels of intervention, particularly at an individual/interpersonal, group or organisational level. They exceed individual and communicational competences, also implying culturally and technologically competent programmes, organisations, services and policies, thus professionals likewise have to know how to use adequate knowledge, strategies and techniques in their educational interventions and practice, in programmes and curricula and in organisational change processes.

Intervening, working, communicating and living in intercultural contexts in peaceful and supportive societies requires training and the development of a varied and multifaceted set of competences, which we can be grouped as follows (RAMOS, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2013, 2017, 2020b):

- *Individual competences,* which develop attitudes, behaviours and values that foster harmonious social interactions among individuals, groups and cultures, promote constructive and innovative interpersonal relationships, self-reflection, self-knowledge, critical reflec-

tion and a decentring attitude, which will make it possible to loose and put into perspective principles, models and methods, particularly of an educational nature, presented as superior, single and universal, thus avoiding many ethnocentric, intolerant, violent, discriminatory and exclusion behaviours.

- *Intercultural competences*, especially in language, communication and pedagogy which will, on the one hand, facilitate intercultural communication and education, and cultural formation and awareness and, on the other hand, promote culturally competent and inclusive interventions, as well as professionals and citizens who are culturally receptive, supportive, engaged and prepared to live, communicate and work in the multicultural society of nowadays.

- *Citizenship competences*, which will make it possible for the global and technological contemporary society to function in a democratic, peaceful, inclusive and plural way, in particular its organisations and offices, especially those related to education.

- *Technological competences*, particularly at the level of audio-visual technologies, the use of new digital information and communication technologies and the Internet. These technologies, by means of digital inclusion, are aimed at fostering the democratisation of teaching, transnational education and social inclusion, as well as promoting intercultural communication and making virtual meetings available, which facilitate not only the contact between cultures and intercultural relationships, but also the information, communication, education and learning resources available anywhere in the world.

In addition to evidencing the positive results related to these new information and communication technologies in intercultural, formal or remote teaching and training, organisations and studies have recognised their importance as agents for a greater inclusion, participation and cooperation of students in learning environments, fostering new working methods, new values and competences, new relationship arrangements and new paradigms of information, education, communication and interculturalism. They also stress more active, open, supportive, collaborative and independent participations on the part of students, particularly in accordance with the directives of Bologna, the Council of Europe, UNESCO and the European Commission relating to intercultural education, student mobility, communication and interaction in a global, multicultural and interdependent world and Europe (UNESCO, 2001, 2013, 2020; CE, 2001, 2008; OECD, 2007; SOBRAL & RAMOS, 2012; RAMOS, 2001, 2003, 2007, 2013, 2016, 2017, 2020b; WIT, 2015).

Some authors have pointed out the advantages which derive from intercultural training, namely at several levels: increased capability to handle individual and cultural differences; increased wellbeing and satisfaction in intercultural relationships; lower stress and improvement in interpersonal and intergroup relationships and in the work with children, young people and adults of different and minority cultures; increased openness to the world, innovation and alterity; increased capability to solve problems which require cultural understanding, communication and a relationship with other cultures and the adaptation to

change (COHEN-ÉMERIQUE, 1993, 1999; BRISLIN & YOSHIDA, 1994; RAMOS, 2003, 2007, 2012, 2013, 2016).

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

New social, intercultural, communicational and political contexts have contributed to: reinforce the multi/interculturalism and transnationality of societies, organisations, education and training; blur borders, environments and geographic, cultural and communicational distances; increase international mobility, with particular prominence to student physical and virtual mobility and the internationalisation of teaching; promote interdisciplinarity and new communicational and technological resources in the teaching and training process, especially in higher education; provide an opening to questioning and critical reflection within the scope of education, communication and training and in respect of contents, competences and processes of teaching-learning mediated by intercultural and interdisciplinary relationships and by digital artefacts.

International student and qualified mobility, migrants and refugees, and the development and use of information and communication technologies will continue to increase all over the world, reinforcing diversity, complexity and heterogeneity in social, educational and communicational contexts and requiring an opening to adequate change, innovation and training. It is necessary to develop an integrated, global and multi/interdisciplinary approach to human mobility, based on the fundamental human rights and the formulation of good practices and adequate public policies. This approach must include fostering the rights and inclusion of migrants and refugees and facing the main causes for migration in the country of origin, such as poverty, exclusion, inequalities, undemocratic governance, social and political instability, conflicts and war, as well as include specific strategies and policies addressed to this population, in both the countries of origin and the receiving countries. Policies and interventions at a local, national and international level must be humanised and culturally competent.

It is fundamental to foster training and intervention which will facilitate development, the rights and the participation of all individuals and groups and contribute to a plural, intercultural and cosmopolitan society capable of integrating alterity and appreciating (multi) interculturalism, citizenship and intercultural dialogue. This training will have to explain and contribute to understanding cultural diversity and prejudices and stereotypes socially constructed in relation to minorities and to religious, social, ethnocultural, generational, sexual and gender differences, in addition to the procedures to fight them in order to facilitate alterity, inclusion, human rights and positive expectations in relation to minorities.

The training of professionals in the field of interculturalism must improve contents, competences and practices which contribute to individual and social development, empowerment and wellbeing, facilitate the development of humanising and emancipating practices to implement inside interpersonal, intergroup and intercultural relationships, and help im-

plementing public policies which foster the welcoming, social inclusion, education, equal opportunities and human rights of all individuals and groups.

It is important for the population in general, in particular for professionals, to develop competences which foster relational and communicational representations, attitudes and practices that are not marked by prejudiced, stereotyped and discriminatory behaviours, but rather take into account the culture, social context, ways of communicating, values and expectations of the populations with which they coexist every day in a social, educational or working context. The development of communicational and intercultural competences is likewise an ethical, civic and professional requirement and responsibility to face the mobility, complexity, heterogeneity and individual and cultural diversity of contemporary world, being fundamental for all those who live in a contemporary society and for an intercultural coexistence and peace. Organisations and offices must include a psychosocial and ecological-cultural approach in their intervention among the individuals and groups that they welcome. Intercultural education, education for peace and the perception of individual and cultural differences are to be promoted not as a problem, but rather as an opportunity for the improvement and progress of everyone.

The mobility of individuals and groups and the search for opportunities, supporting structures and services by individuals coming from different ethnocultural groups will continue to increase all over the world, being necessary to develop organisations, services and interventions, as well as to train professionals who are receptive and competent in respect of the issues of human mobility and cultural diversity. A multi/intercultural society and a globally interdependent world need a new approach of citizenship, education and communication for migrant and native populations, which will embody the dynamics of change, diversity and interculturalism, and the fundamental principles of human rights in strategies and policies fostering human development, wellbeing, solidarity, equal opportunities and a full access to citizenship for everyone, in particular for minority groups.

These issues are a concern for UNESCO (2001) when it states, in Article 2 of its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity: "In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace".

It appears as likewise important to implement sustainable, inclusive, coordinate and transnational strategies and policies which will contribute to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals - 2030 (UNITED NATIONS, 2015), especially the following:

- Eradicate poverty in every form and everywhere (SDG 1);
- Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDG 4);
- Reduce inequality within and among countries (SDG 10);

- Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels (SDG 16).

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