



**Final Symposium of the HE4u2 project**  
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## ***Barriers in international research on cultural diversity – terminology & languages, historical & cultural: foes or enemies?***

*Dialogue between researcher and practitioner  
around the meaning of university excellence*



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Integrating cultural diversity in Higher Education - HE4u2

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## **Scope and aim**

- ▶ **1. Cultural diversity as a challenge in European HE**
- ▶ **2. Research landscape**
- ▶ **3. Language matters**
- ▶ **4. Transference to practice**
- ▶ **5. University excellence? Beyond the academic and towards the collective**



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## Cultural diversity as a challenge in HE

- ▶ The teaching and learning environment perspectives are still **quite seldom addressed** in research or policy related documents of embracing diversity in higher education.
- ▶ A **gap** still seems to persist between policy and practice in this area however.



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## Cultural diversity as a challenge in HE

- ▶ At the interface of the civic and corporate imaginaries, terms like **'diversity' can mean very different things**, but as economic rationalism prevails, HE institutions are increasingly enacting a selective recognition of difference in ways that frame diversity as something to be marketed, consumed and also, contained.
- ▶ **Difference** becomes a means for students to develop more marketable skills (e.g. 'intercultural competency'), or to increase institutional revenues indirectly by enhancing the global profile of an institution.
- ▶ At the same time, there are **fewer institutional spaces** to critically examine local and global inequities, epistemic hegemony, or national exceptionalisms.



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## Cultural diversity as a challenge in HE

- ▶ These issues are not unique to the contemporary moment, but rather a part of an enduring global imaginary that presumes a series of **hierarchical power relations** premised on the basic assumption of European superiority and non-European inferiority.
- ▶ These uneven relations arose and were cemented during the era of Western colonisation, but they have not disappeared. Rather, they have been reimagined to allow for formal disavowal of Western supremacy while nonetheless largely maintaining Western political and economic advantage, and the **presumption of Western epistemic universality**.
- ▶ Thus, it remains important to **ask how these are reframed** within the corporate imaginary of the university, and in relation to embracing diversity specifically.



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## Research landscape

- ▶ Within the research landscape, the university is a critical institution for transmitting values and attitudes that honour openness and learning from difference. HE can provide a place where people learn the skills and competences that will help them **resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner and learn to live with diversity on a daily basis**.
- ▶ Recent events have demonstrated that **alienation, marginalisation and lack of belonging** can make people more susceptible to extremist views and violent actions that can cause pain and suffering with ripple effects throughout European societies.
- ▶ If the increasing cultural, ethnic and religious diversity is **not addressed** effectively, and people continue to feel excluded, social cohesion in European societies will be at risk.
- ▶ If **managed properly**, diversity provides advantages rather than threats to European societies. There are indications that diversity can improve productivity, creativity and efficiency.



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## Research landscape

- There are essentially six major research variables, issues or themes identified in relation to students with diverse ethnic and cultural background:
  1. personal **background** variables;
  2. educational **policies** that regulate higher education and promote (or not) wider participation;
  3. cultural and political **dynamics** related with globalisation, multiculturalism and inclusion;
  4. organizational **support** and policies such as the existence of services that actually uphold and nurture the academic inclusion of students from migrant or minority backgrounds, or mission statements that value and celebrate diversity;
  5. students' **experiences** that include more direct, face-to-face interactions with higher education agents, including peers, teachers and staff, in- and out-of-class, together with a series of curricular and co-curricular opportunities for engagement; and
  6. personal, institutional and societal **gains**, that include both the potential advantages for individual students, for higher education institutions and for societies as a whole.



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## Research landscape

- One important aspect in research is the **difficulty in defining** who are the ethnic and culturally diverse minorities and migrants in higher education, taking into account the diversity of historical, social, economic and political contexts.
- Most analysis is based on the assumption that ethnic minorities and migrants are **historically invisible groups** in higher education, whose rights of participation and success may still not be ensured.
- **Data collection among students in higher education seems therefore to be considered a good research practice as it may provide a deeper knowledge of underrepresented groups.**



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## Language matters

- ▶ Teaching concepts in higher education need to take aspects of **communication and interaction in a diverse language** into account. For both the academic teaching staff and the students/participants this implies a need for greater tolerance than previously towards differences in language usage.
- ▶ In the context of embracing diversity in higher education, **the “native speaker model”**, according to which learners are to be taught to speak *like* native speakers mainly to native speakers, **has somewhat expired** as communication for the most part takes place between or to non-native speakers.
- ▶ What matters is **comprehensibility**, in addition to the ability to recognise that it may take some time to adapt to and understand “unfamiliar accents”



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## Language matters

- ▶ HE teachers are faced with and have to cope with classroom diversity in general and, specifically in the context of ethno-culturally diverse students, with **differing language levels**.
- ▶ We need to **adapt or accommodate ourselves to others** if necessary, but we also need to discern potential communication problems, which indicate an awareness of their own and others' socio-cultural norms and schemata.
- ▶ We must try to **strengthen the focus on comprehensibility** - without necessarily sounding like a native speaker - and have to be able to formulate expectations with appropriate directness.



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## Transference to practice

- ▶ With regard to a wider pedagogical perspective, this means creating a teaching and learning culture **together** with the students that is adjusted to cross-culturality.
- ▶ For achieving this aim, **role expectations** need to be made more explicit than before.
- ▶ Moreover, knowledge of the **contextual dimension** is very helpful for teaching staff for clarifying their options for action.



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## Transference to practice

- ▶ With respect to teaching in ethno-culturally diverse groups, the **link between language use and changing contents seems to be crucial**, which implies that the group itself could be an additional resource.
- ▶ Social rather than **markedly individualised models** (like output orientation or learner-centeredness) could open up a variety of perspectives on internationalisation that see diversity as resource for enriching the scientific setting.



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## Transference to practice

- ▶ Any innovative “diversity embracing” approach to teaching and learning must raise **pedagogical sensitivity** and essentially support key learning skills for a culturally diverse learning group, while at the same time recognise and integrate students’ own knowledge and experiences into the learning process.
- ▶ In this respect migrant and ethnic minority students are not seen as merely passive recipients of support measures, but **positively involved and engaged** in the definition and implementation of the teaching and learning process.
- ▶ Their cultural perspectives and contributions can be **embedded in the teaching and learning process of the curriculum** so that their experience will be valued for its contribution to enriching the internationalisation and interculturality of the curriculum for all learners



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## University excellence? Beyond the academic and towards the collective\*

- ▶ Reflective Dialogue
- ▶ Interdisciplinarity/Crossdisciplinarity
- ▶ Participatory Action Research
- ▶ University Solidarity Learning (USAL) instead of University Lifelong Learning (ULL)

\* A *collective* is a group of entities that share or are motivated by at least one common issue or interest, or work together to achieve a common objective.

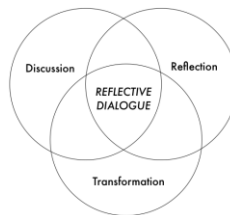


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## Reflective Dialogue

- ▶ Reflective dialogue is a special kind of discussion that can be used strategically in the classroom to **build community**, expand the capacity for listening, and cultivate individual reflection. To lead a reflective dialogue, the instructor steps back and moderates with a light touch, mainly to ensure that all participants have a chance to share their thoughts and to keep the discussion focused on an established “object” or objects of inquiry, which is used to explore an important theme.

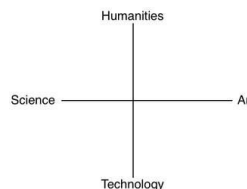


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## Interdisciplinarity/Crossdisciplinarity

- ▶ Interdisciplinarity refers to a method or mindset that **merges traditional educational concepts or methods in order to arrive at a new approaches or solutions**. Interdisciplinarity is an increasingly important concept within both academic research and the private sector, as it allows both a rigorous and nimble approach to subjects of both great nuance and complexity.
- ▶ Crossdisciplinarity encourages **collaboration between researchers working in different disciplines and with users of research**. It recognises the benefits of cooperation and partnership during the development of research ideas as well as in the research process itself.



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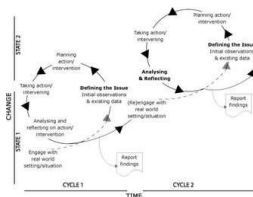


## Participatory Action Research

- ▶ Participatory action research is a form of action research in which **professional social researchers operate as full collaborators with members of organizations in studying and transforming those organizations**. It is an ongoing organizational learning process, a research approach that emphasizes co-learning, participation and organizational transformation. A systematic collection and analysis of data for the purpose of taking action and making change” by generating practical knowledge.
- ▶ A participatory, democratic process concerned with **developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes**, grounded in a participatory worldview and bringing together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and communities.



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## University Solidarity Learning (USAL) instead of University Lifelong Learning (ULL)

- ▶ Solidarity brings others into our personal learning project and **puts the social into higher education**.
- ▶ Higher education is a social process and creates opportunities for people to learn together. This is in contrast to a correspondence course or shopping mall offering a one-to-one transaction or off-the-peg qualification. **Learning stems from a commitment to our personal development**.
- ▶ Active two-way solidarity requires **respect and understanding of the other**. This sense of mutuality and reciprocity creates some of the strongest social bonds and is a good basis for genuinely educational relationships.



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## University excellence? Beyond the academic and towards the collective

*Life is about relationships; so the teaching community is important to learning. I think there is, in that community, accountability. [The students and the teachers] know one another and know their strengths and weaknesses. ... [so] they begin to care about each other as persons. Hopefully [students and teachers] are developing some deep relationships overtime and that when life happens maybe they can step in and support and encourage..."*

[interview GR\_GP3\_Edu4\_F\_171019, translation from Greek]



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