



Interculturality in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities

An Action-Research-Training Project in Italy*

❖ Enrica Ottone – Luca Pandolfi



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Abstract

This contribution is the Introductory Chapter and description of the research project *Multiculturality and intercultural competences in ecclesiastical institutions of higher education and in formation communities of consecrated life*, carried out in Italy in the years 2018-2021 at some ecclesiastical institutions of higher education and at some formation communities of both female and male Institutes of Consecrated Life. The authors, directors of the research, recount the origins and development of the project, illustrate the conceptual framework of the research, the objectives, the hypothesis and the methodological choices. They also present the sample and the instruments of animation and qualitative and quantitative investigation used to collect information and carry out activities that had a certain formative impact on the realities involved. The general objective of the Action Research was to understand the present or absent transformations regarding formative experiences and intercultural competences in highly multicultural educational contexts.

Keywords

Action Research – Multicultural communities – Formative communities – Intercultural competences – Intercultural training – Higher education

Enrica Ottone teaches Social Pedagogy, Intercultural Pedagogy, Experimental Pedagogy, and Ethics and Professional Deontology at the Pontifical Faculty of Educational Sciences Auxilium (Rome). She obtained her PhD in Educational Sciences – Specialisation in Social Pedagogy at the UPS in Rome with a thesis entitled "Human Rights and School Education Processes: An Action-research Project in a Secondary School". Her main areas of interest are: Teaching and Learning; Educational Technology; Assessing and Promoting Strategic Learning and Intercultural Competences; Citizenship Education.

Luca Pandolfi holds a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, in Theology and a Master's Degree in Fundamental Theology from the Pontifical Gregorian University, an MA in Sociology from the Sapienza University of Rome as well as a PhD in Ethno-Anthropology from the same university. He is full professor of Cultural Anthropology, and also teaches Sociology of Religion, Intercultural Communication, Communication and Pastoral, Social Doctrine of the Church at PUU. Pandolfi was also dean of the ISCSM (2019/2022) and directed the PUU Social Communications Centre (2006/2022). He has been visiting professor in Latin American (Chile, Argentina, El Salvador, Mexico) and Roman Universities (UPS, PFSEA). He has authored four books and several articles.

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1

Introduction

This contribution presents a brief historical survey, together with the theoretical framework and methodology adopted, in the realization of an action-research-training project carried out in Italy over a time span of 2018 to 2021, *Multiculturalism and intercultural competences in ecclesiastical institution of higher education and in formation communities of consecrated life*, with the participation of a number of ecclesiastical institutions of higher education and with some formative communities of Institutes of Consecrated Life (both female and male), and Societies of Apostolic Life (henceforth ICL, for brevity). The general objective of the project was to elucidate the current, or even absent, transformations regarding the training experience, and to delineate the nature of the intercultural competences developed by those taking part in highly multicultural training contexts. Before describing the research project design, it is useful to reconstruct the context in which the project developed, as well as the theoretical framework which guided the team in the formulation and conceptualization of the investigation's hypotheses and target focus. In the second part of the Chapter we illustrate the sampling procedures used, the methodology adopted, and the instruments of social enquiry utilized in the collection of information and in the realization of the learning experiences activated in the contexts and realities involved.

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The origins of the research

The project took off following an academic survey carried out in the United States of America into the local dynamics of multiculturalism in female, catholic Institutes of Consecrated Life (ICL). Led by Trinity Washington University and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), Georgetown University of Washington DC, the research project *International Sisters in the United States* was presented in Rome, at the beginning of 2017, at the *Unione Internazionale delle Superiori Generali* (UISG), which deals with the coordination of the congregations of the female Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life¹.

Several professors from the *Istituto Superiore di Catechesi e Spiritualità Missionaria* (ISCSM), *Pontifical Urbaniana University* (PUU), were present on this occasion, including the acting rector of the time, father Alberto Trevisiol, "Missionario della Consolata", and full professor of History of the Mission. Father Trevisiol conceived the idea to see how far, and in what way, the ISCSM, characterized over a long period by a strong internationalization of both faculty staff and students, and containing a notable number of consecrated women, could possibly reproduce and be in line with the results emerging from the American research, while, at the same time prompting the compilation of a research thesis which dealt with their own specific context.

Professor Tiziana Longhitano, then acting dean of ISCSM, together with professor Luca Pandolfi, full professor of Cultural Anthropology and professor of Sociology of Religion at the same institute, hence decided to put together a small team for the elaboration of a research project. It immediately became clear that they needed to widen their scope, delineate more closely the nature of the knowledge to be gained from the attempt, describe the methodology to be adopted with precision, involve more parties, and also to envisage adequate financing to sustain the whole initiative.

Half-way through 2017, the ISCSM (PUU), in partnership with UISG, and in collaboration with the *Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium* (PFSEA), Rome, (with, in particular, professor Enrica Ottone, professor of Intercultural Pedagogy) all decide to launch a project similar to the American one, but with several significant differences. Unlike the research conducted in the USA, which was focused on multicultural cohabitation among female ICL, the Italian investigation would include both a male and a female reference population. There would be less emphasis on the

dynamics of cohabitation, and more on the dynamics and content of learning, and also, other than ICL, the enquiry would be extended to include ecclesiastical institutions of higher education. The objective was to involve a number of Italian pontifical academic institutions strongly marked by multiculturalism among faculty staff and students, while, in parallel, giving cognizance to multicultural education within the communities of consecrated life, extended to both female and male houses, located in Rome but also in other parts of Italy. In some ways a possible comparison was envisaged, but also a significant convergence: over a substantial majority of students in the ecclesiastical academic institutions selected for the research as well as on the high degree of international provenance, which was, and still is, represented by the members of ICL communities dealing with formation.

The project was presented to the GHR Foundation, evaluated in detail, and at the end of 2017 was accepted with enthusiasm and received financing, not only because it constituted the development and application of a valid preceding piece of research (the American one)², but also because of its innovative content and methodology, and the accompanying chances of acquiring new knowledge and competences in the process.

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The context, the motivations and relevance of the research project

The topic area and the human experience which are the subjects of this investigation are not entirely new. The ICL had been reflecting for years on the themes of multiculturalism, interculturality, and, above all, on the community and pastoral dynamics associated with these. Instead, in the Italian context, the local state or private universities have been looking at the internationalization of their members only recently, and systematically only from the second decade of 2000³: it is a new phenomenon. This is not the case for the pontifical universities and faculties in Italy: for years they have been marked by a substantial presence of students, teaching staff and trainers of international provenance. But there doesn't seem to have been much consistent reflection on these issues until now. During the preparation and execution phase of the project it was the ICL who recounted how the subject and the question of multiculturalism had been "fashionable" for some time and how, in the last few decades, it had come to occupy the attention of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. A lot less so for the ecclesiastical universities. Generally speaking, the topic had found a place recently in university study structures as single, specific courses, and for some time now in human sciences curricula, but it has appeared a lot less in university education and formation in philosophy and theology⁴.

Over the last ten years we have often shared stories with other researchers involved in the project about our work as educators or public speakers, and our participation in events related to the theme of multiculturalism, connected to community life or pastoral, mission experience in multifarious contexts. However, even though this be the case, in Italy, research into the subject is limited. What is missing is reflection on the role of academic education in philosophy, theology, pastoral care and the human sciences, together with research which is not so much concentrated on intercultural community dynamics, but, rather, on formation in the ICL, given the high level of multicultural presence in Italy.

It could be said that the research carried out by Trinity Washington University and the CARA of Georgetown University, presented in 2017 at UISG, although characterized by a rare, rigorous and comprehensive quantitative analysis, was only the last of many initiatives on the subject which we came to know about, and with which some of us had become involved. The same UISG had also organized various initiatives, culminating in 2020, in training courses for community leaders, which were consistent

and well-organized, dedicated to the management and overseeing of multicultural communities⁵. No less, the “Unione dei Superiori Generali” (USG) [Union of Superiors General], the international coordination of the leadership of the male ICL, had treated the topic of multiculturalism over the same period⁶. Above all, the ICL missionaries were active in the field. The male community “verbita” (“Società del Verbo Divino”) and the female “Serve dello Spirito Santo” had already been aware and productive for years⁷, in collaboration with SEDOS⁸, continuing their long story of reflection and innovative practice⁹. Also the missionary family “comboniana”, since 1999, had highlighted the issue of congregational innovation¹⁰, which was subsequently treated in the “Capitoli generali” (2015), “Assemblee inter-capitolari” and research seminars and workshops (2018)¹¹. We also note great attention to the theme among the “Missionari della Consolata”¹², the “padri Orionini”¹³, etc. The list would indeed be a long one. We also received a great deal more information during the course of the research project, when we were able to listen carefully, raise the issue of ICL in Italy, and share with others some of our intuitions about our investigations into the Italian ICL context¹⁴.

While, on the one hand, the subject was (and continues to be) very topical, on the other hand it often appears to be something that is always starting off but never goes anywhere in a concrete way. It is dealt with on many occasions but never transformed into structural or paradigmatic reform, focused on in various contexts but always depicted as viewed from an unreachable horizon, and instigating systemic and systematic change only with difficulty.

It seems to me that until now – said father Palmiro Mileto, “comboniano” – in our institute there has been uncertainty and discontinuity when addressing this subject, in spite of the production of specific documentation and expressed concern from senior sources, for example by the formative assembly. The possible cause for this uncertainty and discontinuity could possibly be traced to a lack of a basic coherent policy, which from an educational point of view, adopts the intercultural dimension as an integral part of the training process curriculum¹⁵.

The motivations for this research can be summed up in the above quotation. We have been prompted by the desire to understand why, given the fact of widespread multiculturalism, understood to mean the co-existence of people with different linguistic, cultural and national backgrounds (and also generational), this is not reflected in many catholic, ecclesiastical learning environments: the need for competent and profitable interaction, contact and exchange, and reciprocal transformation through operational and forward-looking intercultural dynamics. We have tried to understand the lack of educational practices able to produce and guide the necessary competences to live in a multicultural reality, and create collectively, *interculturality*. Where do the key paths lie? Yet, despite this admission of criticality, we are also looking to identify efficacious experiences and good practices, where they exist.

Having been close to a number of ecclesiastical university contexts with a high multicultural intake, both in faculty staff and students, the questions we have posed are the following: does plurality exist in the courses? Is linguistic diversity accommodated? And as importantly, is course content broadened, reinterpreted and transformed in order to respond to diverse learning paradigms, pedagogic models and content plurality? Given the fact that many of the people who attend these ecclesiastical academic institutions are also members of ICL, living in a formative context of some kind, the next question to ask is: given the multicultural nature of these training *loci*, between trainers and trainees, is there an awareness and are there operational practices in place which adopt models, methods and learning content appropriate to and in line with creating an intercultural reality, which go beyond questions of mere cohabitation?

We are aware of the extensive bibliography on the subject, and starting from our own personal experience, we know that in learning communities characterized by a high level of internationalization it is rare that *multiculturalism* is perceived as the chance to develop *interculturality* through a slow, complex but enriching process which allows people to acquire a sum of *intercultural skills*, indispensable for all contexts of work and life. Even though multiculturalism is an inescapable reality, it is not hard to encounter the lack of its address, and even its denial, in some way. Or it becomes the subject of many discussions but seldom becomes the object of true exchange and transformation practices. The problematic is to understand why. What are the conceptual and operational links and how are they perceived by the people receiving education in universities and the formative communities of the ICL, as well as by their own educators and trainers?

Because of the above considerations, since the beginning, the research group decided to promote a process which was the most participatory possible, involving the chosen contexts, university institutions and the learning communities of the Consecrated Life, inviting them to become *partners* and not only the objects of study. This was not only a question of acquiring permission or inviting them to render their environments to investigation – it was a request to consciously participate and benefit from an opportunity for shared reflection and formation, to furnish space and time to research and also include collaborators working inside the institutions. We asked, from the outset, for them to be with us in living the process, monitoring and participating in the interpretation of the information we gathered.

We proposed, from the outset, a qualitative research methodology using open interviews, but particularly on the use of focus groups, offering a series of interviews with the same group. This is at variance with the classical single encounter. It was important and useful for our investigation to construct a micro-training experience from which the local institution itself could benefit and go deeper while we were collecting lexical items, discourses, ways of seeing and experiencing the dynamics of multiculturalism. From this arose the *epithet* action-research-training. This innovative approach has produced a great deal of fruit, but at the same time has proved not to be without its problematic side, both for those coordinating and managing the research and also for the participants involved.

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The research group

As we mentioned previously, the research group was led from the beginning by a restricted team, composed of, for the PUU, the dean of ISCSM at the time, the theologian, Tiziana Longitano, and professor Luca Pandolfi, anthropologist and sociologist, as well as scientific director of the research. For the UISG, Sister Elisabetta Flick participated in the early phase, a sister involved in the training field, in multiculturalism and the defence of human rights¹⁶. For the PFSEA, and present from the outset there was professor Enrica Ottone, “Figlia di Maria Ausiliatrice”, pedagogist and, with Luca Pandolfi, scientific co-director of the research. It is no accident that this report was written by these two people.

However, the team was immediately enlarged and other teachers and educators from various universities or congregations became involved: Lucia Abignente, theologian, professor at the *Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata Claretianum*, Mariolina Cattaneo, “comboniana” missionary, trainer and professor at PUU, Vito Impellizzari, theologian and director of the *Istituto Superiore di Scienze religiose* of the *Pontificia Facoltà Teologica di Sicilia “San Giovanni Evangelista”* (FaTeSi), Patrizia Mazzola, teacher and trainer in high schools, Rita Kongo Mboshu, professor of Spiritual Theology at PUU, Cristina Montoya, professor of Communication at the *Istituto Universitario Sophia* (IUS) of Incisa and Figline Valdarno (Florence) and Marta Séide, professor of Theology of Education at PFSEA.

Also graduate and doctoral students collaborated with us from the Department of Religious Sciences, Pedagogy, Psychology and Sociology of different universities: Maria Mendes Barbosa, Maria Elena Caridi (PUU); Angela Bencivenga, Serena Cotic, Francesca Fratarcangeli, Ester Frigerio, Lory Pires Soares (PFSEA); Pietro Ciribifera, Simone Filomena, Pietro Passi, Giovanni Rosa (UPS); Federico Barbaro, Manuele Molinari, Francesca Romagnano, Daniele Sollo (Sapienza University of Rome) and Ilaria Troncacci (trainer and educator).

Given the wide variety of origin, age, and disciplinary background, it was important that the entire research group underwent a formative experience, self-training as well as shared preparation, both before and during the launch phases of the project in the country. In the team building and preparation phase we took the following things into account: a) coming from different academic and religious backgrounds; (b) possessing varying levels of disciplinary competence and professional experience; (c) being different ages and having varying degrees of experience in research in the field. At the same time all of us, in some way, were both inside or outside the world with which we were going to encounter, and this allowed us to keep a useful degree of proximity or distance in the field work. In concrete terms, we had tested with and on ourselves the tools envisaged for the first part of our action-research, that to be carried out using a qualitative methodology. We had, in fact, already simulated the focus groups and the grid of items, which were then to be used on groups of university professors or students, or members of the ICL training groups.

Therefore, we analysed the simulation we had experienced and shared our reflections, thoughts and evaluations, which subsequently aided the transfer of content to methodology and animation, from the gathering and recording of information to improving the instruments we adopted. In fact, we began to see how, also in ourselves, certain processes or subject content came to be perceived, understood and elaborated, where the key links lay and which roads we would need to take to make reality emerge in the most honest and plausible way¹⁷. This work served to establish and formulate a common language and to share the methodology of the action-research project. It also had an interesting first spin off in the formation of around 25 people for the field research on the theme of interculturality.

This was then made use of by the smaller directive group both for the qualitative analysis of the results of the focus groups and the construction of the structured questionnaire, translated into a number of languages, and the quantitative analysis of the data which was carried out, under the supervision and with the collaboration of several external experts. The people who worked with us were Fiorenza Deriu, associate professor of General Sociology in the Department of Statistical Science, Sapienza University of Rome, Luca Di Censi, Sociologist, Scientific Advisor with the Human Foundation of Rome and collaborator with the Sapienza University of Rome, and Nina Deliu, assistant professor at Sapienza University of Rome and researcher with the Department of Biostatistics at the University of Cambridge (UK). This report makes use of their analysis and their precious contribution to the interpretation of the data which was produced.

5

Theoretical framework and conceptual principles

This research is part of a study of cultural processes and by its very nature is both inter and trans-disciplinary. For this reason, the relevant theoretical constructs and the methodologies adopted are multi-faceted and interconnected, and so it is difficult to include them all, here, in any exhaustive way. Having said this, the theoretical framework, on the one side, is directly concerned with cultural anthropology, which is directed at understanding the relationship between verbal forms, repeated utterances, and concrete practices of socialization and cultural reproduction. The ques-

tions posed are what happens, what changes in our operational mode, in certain educational contexts (taking into account the place of cultural transmission and the learning process, the reproduction of forms, meaning, behavioural models and social paradigms), when the context is characterized by cultural plurality of its members and when this plurality is often described discursively in a “rhetorical” way.

Also *Sociological Survey* and *Critical Discourse Analysis* are useful for the project, directed towards the measurement of recurrent “key words” and the communities which produce them: what can emerge from this is the social interaction that is perceived and the meanings that are shared. This can be arrived at in the form of a “quantitative” evaluation, directed at an interpretation of cultural processes without the need for excessive generalizability in the construct: the idea is to use a sampling procedure, multi-layered and purposive, for the measurement of linguistic co-occurrence, lexical patterning, key words and their predominant semantic domains and contexts. For this, transcriptions of the dialogues taking place in the focus groups and the guided interviews are compared with the data gathered from an analysis of the results from the circulation online of a structured questionnaire, using, for the most part, the same items as those used in the focus groups. Then, starting from a knowledge of the interpretative frameworks of intercultural pedagogy, we attempted to identify the conceptual understanding and existence (or absence) of practices in the siting and promotion of intercultural competences: these are intended to mean dynamic competences, processual and multidimensional, the result of a continuous and never-ending learning path. We intended to identify the contexts, itineraries and strategies implemented to promote their growth.

The research is anchored to the defined meanings of three principal concepts, plus one transversal concept important for social understanding and practice. We start with the question of a) *multiculturalism* and b) *interculturality*, the significance of each term and their inter-relationship. In addition, the notion of competences, or rather *intercultural competences* requires definition in order to detect their perception, understanding and diffusion. The concepts are defined and explored here not in isolation but in their interconnectivity and for their related implications in the sharing of learning and life experiences in an educational context marked by internationalization, diversity of cultural background and the possible development of intercultural competences. As well as clarifying the meaning of these three terms, in this section we also look at a fourth one which is currently being much used in the university context, *internationalization*.

The term *multiculturalism* is used here to refer to that social and cultural phenomenon which is realized when there is a stable, and in some way interactive (with or without tensions) co-presence of people coming from different social and cultural backgrounds. The forms of multiculturalism (and models of *multiculturalism*), vary according to the possible interaction forecasted, promoted and received: these may go from separatist division, with few and well-defined interactions, to wider forms, marked by tolerance, exchange and life-work experiences in common. However, the horizon for multiculturalism (given that it is tolerant, welcoming and taken on as a project) still remains a form of reciprocal, cordial but essentially weak exchange unless there is a meeting between the protagonists involved which leads to major, content transformations (in cultural traditions, habits and customs, ways of thinking and behaving): a possible and diversified experience of cohabitation and cooperation¹⁸.

However, in contexts of rising multiculturalism, *interculturality* is a different phenomenon. It is realized with varying degrees of intensity and through long, complex processes, and involves not only acceptance and respect for the other person, in peaceful and tolerant cohabitation, but an exchange and a readiness to undergo reciprocal transformation. It constitutes a substantial, slow modification of some aspects of the presuppositions underlying our own cultural identity, perceived not in static, formal terms, but through processes of exchange, hospitality and inclusion of

the culture of the other, processes which lead to an unexperienced merger and *syncretism*. Interculturality is perceived, here, not only as a horizon to construct but also as an awareness of the phenomena which lead to and filter down to the reconstruction of the presuppositions and assumptions underlying one's own "identity and cultural diversity". Interculturality is seen not to be the realization of an additional, in any case *syncretic*, static phenomenon, the production of a *third*, hybrid culture. Rather, it is envisaged in a dynamic and participatory mode, in a daily search for dialogue, reception, acceptance, understanding and the overcoming of conflict: collaboration and construction of a common and plural future. The future is conceived of as a reciprocal enrichment and a dynamic reciprocal transformation¹⁹.

The creation of interculturality requires a conscious and progressive development of *intercultural competences*, namely an "interrelated whole", conceived of as a "system" of abilities, both specific (intercultural in the strict sense) as well as general and transversal ones (basic communicative and relational), which two or more people implement in interaction and reciprocal exchange in multicultural contexts. These competences can, then, be seen as a structured "system", interconnected and dynamic, consisting of proven abilities to use, in learning situations, at work, in life, and in contact with people (and/or groups) who are conveyors of diverse cultural, linguistic, value-based knowledge, skills and internal orientations (dispositions, values). These abilities allow people to interact in an efficacious and appropriate way with *other* people who are, themselves, conveyors of cultural, linguistic and semantic worlds which are different from theirs²⁰. They are the capacities to manage prejudices, to interpret and understand different cultural traditions, and discover a shared horizon. Someone who has developed these intercultural competences manages to activate, integrate, coordinate and make function their own internal resources, cognitive, affective-relational, motivational and volitional, namely a sum of knowledge and consolidated abilities and other internal, stable dispositions, (such as interest in others, readiness to dialogue). This goes together with the utilization of external resources in a coherent and fruitful fashion²¹. Intercultural competences can be developed over time in different learning contexts, formal and informal. Also new learning paths might be required of them in changing contexts²².

In the context of higher education, we are witnessing an increasing use of the term "internationalization", which assumes different meanings according to the author concerned. In this work we have adopted the following definition: internationalization is an intentional process which consists in the integration of an international, intercultural and global dimension, and, in the rationale and provision of post-secondary education, has the aim of raising the quality of instruction and research for all students and teaching staff, and attributing a significant contribution to society²³. This term does not figure in the empirical evaluation in this research but it is still analysed transversally, especially in the description of the university contexts.

6

The research questions and general objectives

As outlined previously, the action research is motivated by the desire to investigate why, in the face of widespread multiculturalism, understood as the co-presence of people with linguistic, cultural and national differences, this is not reflected in many catholic, ecclesiastical learning environments. There would seem to be a lack of a planning and operational dimension to considerations of intercultural dynamics, thought of as competent and profitable interaction, exchange, influence and reciprocal transformation. The group of teachers, researchers and trainers who started the project were already familiar with the contexts under review (that is to say the ICL formative communities and ecclesiastical universities) because in various ways they were part of them. From their own experience they knew that, in the various educa-

tional environments, multiculturalism was a question of fact, but they were also aware that the situations could be experienced and managed differently.

The problematics of the research *locus* emerge from the fact that two realities are perceived which are in some way contradictory: on the one side a) extensive multiculturalism among students and teachers, trainers and trainees, and on the other side b) much theoretical and speculative attention to the subject in the form of thematic focussing and public discussion, but little actual intercultural transformative practice. The aim of the action research was to understand how this state of affairs had happened and why. We wanted to create a way (through the use of a structured, purposive sample) for the recognition and explanation of what was blocking this mechanism: extending from the experience and awareness of reality (multicultural), with its resources or problematics, to a consideration of the competences and operational transformations of the same situation (towards a more interactive form of multiculturalism or towards a more mature experience of interculturality).

On the one side, multiculturalism, a general historical fact in catholic ecclesiastical institutions, with members from every part of the world, has been, for some time now, experimented with in new and specific ways in the training context. This is particularly true in the ICL, with their international spread. Due to a decline in the number of people desiring to join, and consequently a reduction in the training population, there has been an increasing preference to conduct training houses with consecrated men and women from diverse provenance. Instead, the Roman and Italian ecclesiastical academic institutions have been experimenting with internationalization for decades. Anyway, after having trained students coming from all parts of the catholic world, also thanks to the increasing internationalization and mobility of the ICL members, today, as well as the usual internationalization of many students, we are witnessing plurality of origin in many teaching staff. Another important contextual factor for our Action Research is that, even though Italy and Europe have historically been the sites of the founding of many ICL, these are continuously being less chosen as first or second formative places, preferring, instead, contexts in different continents²⁴. At the same time, the existence of many university institutes (especially in Rome) still attracts many people from all over the world, who find congregational and inter-congregational education in Italy, and where they can combine formation for the Consecrated Life with academic education. So we can say that the ecclesiastical universities, today, are still characterized by a high level of internationalization, but anyway no less than in ICL formative places present in Italy. And we should remember that the members of the latter are made up of a good part of the students of the former. Moreover, this plurality is more pronounced than several decades ago in the original provenance of trainers, educators and teachers. But what has happened to this widespread multiculturalism?

For the research project we have tried to model three different situations, in order of the multiculturalism we perceive to be significant in our realities. These can be summed up as follows:

- a) Multiculturalism is *not addressed* as a question. It is perceived only as background (enriching and/or problematic, and is denied in both the content and practice of learning.
- b) Multiculturalism is *the subject of much discourse, moments of representation and recognition of diversity, but rare in transformative practices* in the content and practice of learning.
- c) Multiculturalism is *the occasion of a slow, complex but enriching process of exchange, of interaction and transformative intercultural dynamics*, directed to both the content and practices of learning.

When applied to the management of multiculturalism in the educational institutions under review, the three scenarios indicated above can be described in more detail as follows:

a) The first scenario (with three variations)

Multiculturality is *not* addressed as a question. It is perceived only as background (enriching and/or problematic, and is denied in both the content and practice of learning

1. A *universalist* vision predominates: multicultural/cultural diversity is not taken into consideration or is denied. In brief: “*There is no need to oversee it because basically we are all the same ...*” Some indicators of this scenario which we could meet in the formative communities are, for example, the exclusive use of the Italian language (or of only one language), the lack of alternative offers which take into account traditions, content and approaches which are different from Eurocentred ones, and which favour interaction.
2. An *assimilationist* vision prevails: multicultural/cultural diversity must be integrated through a progressive adjustment of the different subject to the dominant context. In short: “*They must become us*”. The following indicators can be detected: widespread evidence of diversity considered as a problem, action and training offers designed to encourage people to integrate/assimilate and to acquire the language, habits, customs, subject content and didactic approaches of the host country. The communicated message (often implicit) is this: “*We are in Italy, here we do it like this, you must adapt, we will help you to do it ...*”. Even when there is guidance directed at the question of conflict or problematics, this is lived only in a psycho-social, inter-relational, ethical-religious key, and never as a part of the cultural dynamics of alternative interpretations of existence and relationships.
3. There is evident discomfort and inability to face multicultural/cultural diversity because it is too problematic. In short: “*We don't know how to deal with it, therefore we won't*”. The following indicators can be detected: widespread evidence of diversity seen as a problem and consequently no policy or offers directed at giving an answer to it.

The third variation, tends to change into the second one, particularly in the smaller contexts, and those with fewer resources.

b) The second scenario

Multiculturality is *the subject of much discourse, moments of representation and recognition of diversity, but rare in transformative practices in the content and practice of learning.*

4. Here there is a *relativist/separatist* vision: multicultural/cultural diversity is recognized but managed in a way that deals with the surface of relationships and the educational context. The co-presence and/or cohabitation among people with diverse cultural backgrounds is considered an opportunity for a possible enrichment, but only in terms of reciprocal knowledge and the chance for “occasional” or “marginal” recognition. The following indicators will be: limited use of more than one language and only for specific activities, the sporadic existence of reciprocal practices of presentation and knowledge (“Populations Day”), meetings with presentations of traditions and local customs, occasional use of the forms, artefacts, songs, and food belonging to different national or ethnic traditions. Also in this case when there is guidance directed at tackling conflict or problematics, this is predominantly experienced in a psycho-social, inter-relational, ethical-religious key, and rarely as a part of the cultural dynamics of alternative interpretations of existence and relationships.

Besides, as mentioned previously, even if the multicultural and intercultural question is treated in several moments of assembly or training as a theme and a subject for investigation and study, this is not transferred into systematic practice nor into the transformation of the models and content of formation. It is underpinned

by an objectivised and static idea of culture and cultural identity. We define this as multiculturalism in which exchange remains weak and superficial: there is tolerance, respect, curiosity, dialogue, but this happens intermittently, and not in a performative sense, either. This vision gives room for weak forms of interaction: *“Diversity is fine, but everyone lives in their own way and lets others live in their own way ... It’s important to give space to everyone but we need to find a prevailing and functional modality of interaction where diversity takes second place ... Every one of us has their own cultural identity and it’s only fair to respect other people’s, without losing one’s own...”*. There is acceptance, adjustment, occasional adoption of different habits but without any significant change, and only with regard to non-structural questions: there is work done on linguistic translation, but not on the attention to diversity of content and paradigms. There is the tendency to place only very general folkloristic and traditional aspects at the centre, without considering the complexity, the multiplicity of factors which come into play in the preceding and current global and local contacts of each person. We can cite some basic competences which are in place and which demonstrate a certain degree of exchange, even if they are weak: the awareness of one’s own and others’ diversity, acceptance, respect, tolerance for diversity, the predisposition to acquire knowledge about ethno-folkloristic traditions of cultures other than one’s own.

c) The third scenario

Multiculturalism is the occasion of a slow, complex but enriching process of exchange, of interaction and transformative intercultural dynamics, directed to both the content and practices of learning.

5. Co-presence and cohabitation are managed with awareness and purpose, activating processes of exchange, knowledge and reciprocal transformation, together with guidance in creating common meanings in an intercultural horizon. From the indicators we can detect: stable practices of exchange, enrichment and personal and institutional transformation in a cultural key. There are systematized paths of intercultural education and the development of intercultural competences, not only episodic ones. What emerges in these qualified trainers and trainees are specific intercultural competences, that is to say knowledge, ability and integral predispositions (behaviours, values) which allow them to interact in an efficacious and appropriate way with people who are the conveyors of cultural, linguistic and semantic worlds different from their own: the capacity to deal with prejudices, to listen, to culturally decentralize, to be empathetic, to critically interpret their own and others’ cultures, to understand the other, and to find together shared meanings and paths. In this academic reality there is space for languages, educational content, and a pluralistic didactic methodology in response to cultural diversity and the promotion of occasions of exchange: in the content and methodology of the formation, evaluation, selection and interaction with the teaching staff, experience and intercultural competences were verified, assessed and given credit to.

In the ICL we see an extended, hybrid interculturalism, in the sense that it involves a reinterpretation of the attraction to, knowledge of and dialogue with diverse spiritual, theological and sociocultural paradigms in the structural redefinition of the community organization; in the formation path the dimension of the evaluation and the promotion of intercultural competences is central.

The research therefore investigates *“if and in what way”* the experience of training together in an educational and learning community (at university and/or in the community of the Consecrated Life), characterized by the multiculturalism of its members, is able to give value to and promote the meeting and exchange among people with

different cultural backgrounds: if, and in what way, it enriches and transforms learning content and processes, enables the construction of intercultural experience and the development of intercultural competences. Or, rather, if all this doesn't happen, why not.

7

The specific objectives of the research project

In connection with the research questions and general objectives, we have tried to analyse, operationalize and distinguish specific objectives which will enable us to reassemble and construct a general framework. These are indicated in the form of the following questions:

- Which of the three scenarios described above is predominant in the sample communities involved?
- What are the perceptions of the participants in the research from the learning communities?
- What kind of interaction is in place in the academic communities and the Consecrated Life characterized by multiculturalism?
- How are intercultural competences, essential for life in multicultural contexts, perceived, experienced and promoted?
- What actions at an institutional level have been activated to promote the development of these competences?
- What are the prospects for a future intercultural transformation of various present realities?
- Finally, thinking about the three scenarios, what kind of transformation would lead to the dominance of one scenario over another?

The specific objectives of the research correspond to a series of interdependent intentions aimed at:

- a) revealing and describing the dynamics at work in the learning contexts characterized by multiculturalism, that is to say to analyse and understand the type of interaction in place in the contexts of universities and the communities of the Consecrated Life (at the individual and institutional level with regard to processes and actions, active or absent);
- b) exploring the intercultural competences which are useful for interaction in multicultural contexts, which ones are they and how are they experienced, understood and promoted, identifying those which are already present and in action, and those which need to be activated and strengthened;
- c) putting into place educational itineraries to promote the awareness of the need to identify and acquire a sum of intercultural competences through targeted and systematic formation, to be utilized in study and learning contexts, ordinary life, and life/mission.

Inherent to the general and specific objectives described above, the total coordinated activity of the described project also contained several indirect objectives, namely some results to be expected at the end of its execution. We list four here. The first two have been fully achieved.

- ISCSM, together with the partners of the Project, held an International Congress at PUU in November 2021 on the theme of the survey, with national and international collaboration.
- Edited by ISCSM, a scientific volume was published containing the results of the research-action-training project and the contributions presented at the International Congress.

The following two have produced some first results, but those of the entire research path will be monitored for the effects which will happen in the long term.

- The PUU (ISCSM), the PFSEA, the ITVCC of the *Pontificia Università Lateranense* (PUL) of Rome and the IUS of Loppiano have experienced a collaboration which opens up future research in which also other research centres or university institutions can be involved.
- Once the action-research-training project was concluded, several university communities and formative communities belonging to a number of ICL started pilot research projects or action and education on intercultural transformation in the different institutions, and/or formative paths to constitute and promote intercultural competences among trainers and trainees in their communities.

The project also has other specific objectives, namely the expected results in the action-research-training perspective, thought of as a participatory dynamic of transformation of the realities involved. On the training horizon, after the culmination of the experience and the sharing of the results, it is to be hoped that the participants recognize and value cultural diversity as a formative opportunity related to the development of intercultural competences. As “expected results” (action anticipated for the future) these can be described according to the three types of participant in the project.

Members of a multicultural community (academic or consecrated life training)

- They are aware that multiculturalism is a resource and they tend to realize interculturalism not only by accepting and respecting difference, in peaceful and tolerant cohabitation, but through reciprocal exchange and transformation;
- They are predisposed to activate processes of inter-exchange, hospitality, inclusion into the culture of the other in the perspective of a reciprocal dynamic of enrichment and transformation;
- They recognize that cohabitation involves a substantial and slow modification of some aspects of one’s own cultural identity assumptions;
- They experiment with a daily search for dialogue, for acceptance, for the overcoming of prejudices and conflicts, for understanding and collaboration;
- They perceive that cultural plurality concerns and proposes processes of change also in content and methods.

Formative Institutes (academic and ICL communities)

- They recognize and value multiculturalism in the institutional choices and actions which particularly concern internationalization, plurality, the contextualization of courses offered and curricula, reflecting the international composition of both teaching staff and trainers;
- They promote inter-exchange between people and groups of different provenance through formal and informal activities, and by creating the conditions for this to happen (space, time, instruments, itineraries).

Teachers and educators

- They are aware that cultural plurality concerns and proposes processes of change also in educational content, methods and learning paths;
- They activate laboratories, research roads and study paths with a view to possible institutional transformation.

8

The population, sample and stages of the research

The reference population is constituted by the ecclesiastical academic institutions, the training communities of the Institutes of the Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life (ICL), present in Italy and characterized by a high level of multiculturalism among teachers and students. Hence, **two reference populations** were identified:

A. The ecclesiastical academic institutions with two units of analysis:

- A1) University teachers (clergy, consecrated men and women, lay people),
- A2) University students (clergy, consecrated men and women, lay people).

B. The female and male ICL formative communities (juniors, novices, students, inter-congregational formative communities, permanent teachers, etc.) with two units of analysis:

- B1) Educators and community directors.
- B2) Members of the formative community.

As it was not possible or opportune to use a random sample, given the objectives of the research, in order to define the sample with which to work, we implemented a purposive procedure and a multi-stage sampling strategy which was in line with our aims²⁵:

- In the first stage three distinct geographical areas were selected in the North, Centre and South of Italy.
- In the second stage a selection was made from the three sample zones derived from the first stage, with particular concentration in the Roman context, where there is a concentration of a higher number of multicultural ecclesiastical academic institutions and training communities of the Institutes of the Consecrated Life: a number of academic communities and a number of religious communities, balancing the sample between male and female religious communities.
- In the third stage all the people in training were included, the consecrated men and women, the priests, and the lay people belonging to the ecclesiastical academic institutions and the formative communities of the Institutes of the Consecrated Life selected in the previous stage (with the exclusion of teachers and educators)²⁶.

The surveyed sample comprises 20 male and female formative ICL communities²⁷ and 15 ecclesiastical Institutions of higher education²⁸. In order to arrive at this result, as Luca di Censi points out, "at each stage, we proceeded with a selection of the (aggregated) units based on criteria that from time to time resulted to be the most adequate and feasible (purposive sampling)²⁹. The adopted form of sampling responds to the need for typological representativeness, considerate of its objective (i.e., assessing the relationships between variables), and allows to compare groups (i.e., social types) of equivalent sample sizes. These are identified through a combined reference to variables considered important, and independently on their numerical representativeness within the general population"³⁰. Despite the adoption of a rigorous procedure, in any case the sampling, as often happens in Action Research, is not random, and the generalizability to the whole population is very limited³¹.

The investigation is designed in two phases, a qualitative and a quantitative one. The first brings to the fore the *qualitative survey* instrument, namely the focus group (FG), using an interview and two other survey instruments, one for the identification/selection of the intercultural competences considered important, and the other consisting of a form for the narration of 'critical incidents'. The survey instruments were constructed *ad hoc* to be used for the research objective and also, at the same time, in formation.

The focus groups were held from the end of September 2018 to the end of January 2020, involving 288 participants from 6 University Institutions and 7 training communities of the Consecrated Life, of which 2 were female and 4 were male, and one mixed. The selection of the groups was made with care to involve situations distributed throughout Italy; even though the majority of the groups were from Rome and its hinterland, there were other groups in the North, Centre and South of Italy. The sample

was enlarged by several groups of ICL members who had met up with the researchers during formative events and conferences (274 people). These were asked to compile the form on intercultural competences, one of the tools used by the participants of the third focus group. The number of forms completed in this phase was 155.

Finally, still in the qualitative phase, it was proposed to the third focus group to write down a story about a 'critical incident', to be carried out under the guidance of a tutor. This involved a total of 75 participants. 23 people from the group selected for the focus groups aligned to the task, but only 6 members of this group completed it (various reasons can be attributed to this but the principal one was that the activity took place *online* from February to May 2020 in the period of very strict restrictions imposed by Covid-19, which had hit Italy). The remaining 69 were lay and consecrated women university students and one consecrated man from PFSEA who were involved in this activity in a period between 2018 and 2020.

In the quantitative research phase, the multilingual Questionnaire was compiled by 535 people. It was filled in online, with free access, from the beginning of March 2021 to the end of June 2021.

Tab. 1 – Number of participants relative to the instruments utilized³²

Instrument used	Total no. of participants	% by gender		% by civil status	
		female	male	consecrated men and women	lay
Focus group	298	47%	53%	/	/
Interview	8	29%	71%	100%	/
Activity Sheet: <i>The competences that are useful in multicultural training contexts</i>	429* (of whom 155 from FG)	72%	28%	/	/
Narration of 'critical incidents'	75* (of whom 6 from FG)	99%	1%	57%	43%
Online Questionnaire	535*	72%	28%	82%	8%
Total	1.342*	/	/	/	/

As we have seen, the research population consisted of two units of analysis (a. the academic communities and b. the ICL formative communities) from which a sample was selected for the qualitative phase and there was free participation in the quantitative phase.

8.1 The ecclesiastical academic communities

As far as the academic communities are concerned, namely universities, faculties and other ecclesiastical institutions of higher education, the population is large and is distributed throughout Italy, even though the grand majority is concentrated in the city of Rome³³. For this reason, Rome is particularly represented in the sample for the high level of diversity and multiculturalism of the people involved. Then we have included three smaller situations, one from the North, one from the Centre and one from the south of Italy, in order to widen the typological representativeness of the sample and to have comparative elements to ascertain homogeneity or divergence. The selection of the academic institutions was based on proximity to the research team or their willingness to participate at the moment of contact and recruitment.

In the qualitative phase, the following were involved in the project (first semester 2018 – first semester 2020): the PUU, the ITVCC of the PUL, the PFSEA of Rome; then, the STI-PIME based in Monza (Milan); the FaTeSi based in Palermo; and finally, the IUS based in Figline and Incisa Valdarno (Florence).

Tab. 2 – Summary of the ecclesiastical academic institutions contacted by the directive team for the qualitative phase (for the period going from the first semester of 2018 to the first semester of 2020)

Academic institutions contacted for the <i>qualitative</i> phase
Pontificia Università Urbaniana (Rome)
Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium (Rome)
Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata Claretianum (Rome)
Istituto Universitario Sophia (Figline and Incisa Valdarno, Florence)
Seminario Teologico Internazionale – PIME (Monza, Milan)
Pontificia Facoltà Teologica di Sicilia San Giovanni Evangelista (Palermo)

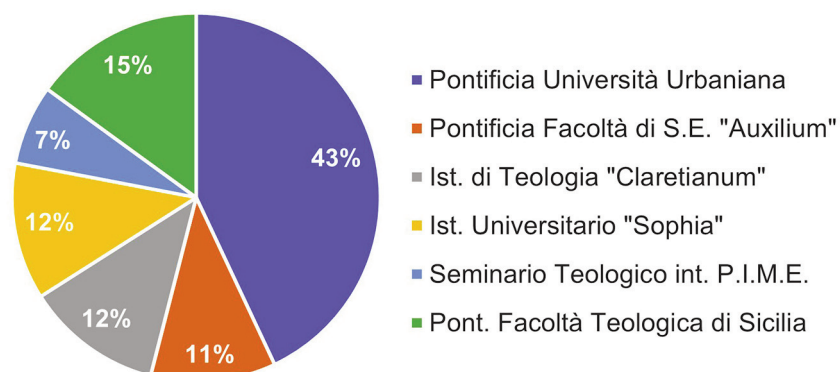
There were 17 groups interviewed from the academic institutions belonging to the project (9 with students, and 8 with teachers) and there were 38 meetings or focus groups (26 with students and 12 with teachers) with the total participation of 92 teachers and 98 students (Tab.3).

Tab. 3 – Number of *focus groups* and participants by ecclesiastical institution of higher education

Participating academic institutions (6)	No. of groups (No. of meetings)		No. of participants		
	Teachers	Students	Teachers	Students	Tot.
Pontificia Università Urbaniana (Rome)	1(2) 2(1)	5(3)	35	46	81
Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium (Rome)	1(2)	1(3)	10	12	22
Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata Claretianum (Rome)	1(2)	1(3)	11	12	23
Istituto Universitario Sophia (Figline and Incisa Valdarno, Florence)	1(2)	1(3)	8	14	22
Seminario Teologico Internazionale – PIME (Monza, Milan)	1(1)	/	14	/	14
Pontificia Facoltà Teologica di Sicilia San Giovanni Evangelista (Palermo)	1(1)	1(2)	14	14	28
Total	8(12)	9(26)	92	98	
	17(38)		190		

The total number of members of the academic communities who participated in the focus groups is 190, of whom 43% belong to the PUU and the rest are equally distributed among the Institutions adhering to the project. (Graph. 1).

Graph. 1 – Distribution percentage of participants in *focus groups* by academic institution



In the second, quantitative, phase (second semester 2021, during the lockdown attendant on the Covid-19 pandemic), for the distribution of the multilingual structured Questionnaire, other academic institutions were contacted but only the UPS, the Pontificia Facoltà Teologica Marianum and the Pontificia Facoltà Teologica Seraphicum, all in Rome, expressed their willingness to collaborate and give news of the survey to their students (Tab. 4).

Tab. 4 – Summary of the ecclesiastical academic institutions contacted by the research team for the quantitative phase (second semester 2021)

Academic institutions contacted for <i>quantitative phase</i>
Pontificia Università Urbaniana (Rome)
Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium (Rome)
Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata Claretianum (Rome)
Istituto Universitario Sophia (Figline and Incisa Valdarno, Florence)
Seminario Teologico Internazionale – PIME (Monza, Milan)
Pontificia Facoltà Teologica di Sicilia “San Giovanni” (Palermo)
Università Pontificia Salesiana (Rome)
Pontificia Facoltà Teologica Seraphicum (Rome)
Pontificia Facoltà Teologica Marianum (Rome)
Pontificia Facoltà Teologica Teresianum (Rome)*

* *It did not adhere to the quantitative analysis phase*

An email consisting of a brief presentation of the project was sent to the Secretary Offices of each university, asking for their willingness to distribute to students a link to the Questionnaire, via their institutional mailing lists, requesting all to participate and compile it online, anonymously. In total, on the basis of the adhesion achieved and the feedback received, around 3,000 students replied. Anyway in this period, repeated lockdowns due to Covid-19, following only brief moments of being open, prohibited didactic activity in person at university, which made it more difficult to sensitize students about the compilation of the online Questionnaire. Table 5 shows a summary of the distribution percentage of the number of Questionnaire compiled per Institution (out of 469).

Tab. 5 – Distribution percentage of participants in Questionnaire by ecclesiastical academic institution*

Participating academic institutions	Percentage
Pontificia Università Urbaniana (Rome)	38.4%
Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione Auxilium (Rome)	25.6%
Istituto Universitario Sophia (Figline and Incisa Valdarno, Florence)	6.0%
Istituto di Teologia della Vita Consacrata Claretianum (Rome)	5.8%
Università Pontificia Salesiana (Rome)	5.1%
Seminario Teologico Internazionale – PIME (Monza, Milan)	3.4%
Other academic institutions	15.7%
Total	100.0%

* *Only those Institutions with a percentage over 3% are listed*

The section of the questionnaire directed to those who follow university received 468 answers, mostly from females (70.4%). The students' answers come from more than 15 Universities, Faculties or ecclesiastical university Institutes, the majority of which were gathered from the sites of Rome³⁴.

8.2 The ICL formative communities

As regards the ICL formative communities marked by multiculturalism, the list of sites in Italy was created consulting the national and international bodies of the ICL: the UISG ("International Union of Superiors General"), the USG ("Union of Superiors General"), the USMI ("Unione Superiore Maggiori d'Italia") and the CISM ("Conferenza Italiana Superiori Maggiori")³⁵.

In the *qualitative* phase of the Action Research a number of formative communities were identified with a view to guaranteeing representativeness between the North, Centre and South of Italy, and between the male and female population. On the basis of the lists and notifications we obtained, the contact was then made in personal form, proposing the online compilation of the Questionnaire to more than 20 formative communities, of which only 7 replied in a positive way (4 male communities, 2 female communities, and 1 from a course including both).

Tab. 6 – Number of ICL formative communities and groups by gender (qualitative phase)

ICL formative Communities (7)	ICL Communities	
	Female (2)	Male (5)
Seminario Teologico Internazionale dei padri della Consolata (Rome)		1
Casa di formazione Noviziato dei padri Comboniani (Naples)		1
Seminario Teologico Internazionale del PIME (Monza, Milan)		1
Casa di Formazione Oblati Maria Immacolata (Vermicino, Rome)		1
Casa Inter-congregazionale di Propaganda Fide "Mater Ecclesiae – Foyer Paolo VI" (Castel Gandolfo, Rome)	1	
Comunità "Madre Ersilia Canta" dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (Rome)	1	
Corso sul Carisma della famiglia Paolina (Rome)	1 (mixed group)	
Total		7

There were 9 groups involved in the focus groups for the 7 formative communities (5 in the male communities, 3 in the female communities and 1 in the mixed group). In total there were 27 meetings (9 with consecrated women, 15 with consecrated men or seminarists and 3 with the mixed group) with a total participation of 108 members, of whom 44% were female and 56% were male.

Besides, as mentioned previously, one of the activities in the third meeting of the focus group involved the compilation of the form *The Competences that are useful in multicultural training contexts*³⁶: this was administered also to several groups of consecrated men and women who the researchers

Luca Pandolfi, Mariolina Cattaneo and Enrica Ottone had already met at conferences or formation courses³⁷. In total, the number of people who were contacted to complete this activity, for the most part consecrated men and women, numbered 429, of whom 155 (67 lay students and 88 consecrated men and women) are among the 167 who participated in the third encounter of the focus groups. So, another 274 were added to do this activity, including consecrated men and women.

Tab. 7 – Number of focus groups and ICL community participants (qualitative phase)

ICL formative Communities (7)	No. of groups (No. of meetings)		No. of participants	
	Consecrated (female)	Consecrated (male)	Consecrated (female)	Consecrated (male)
Seminario Teologico Internazionale dei padri della Consolata (Rome)		1(3)		11
Casa di Formazione Noviziato dei padri Comboniani (Naples)		1(3)		14
Seminario Teologico Internazionale del PIME (Monza, Milan)		2(3)		22
Casa di Formazione degli Oblati Maria Immacolata (Vermicino, RM)		1(3)		13
Casa Inter-congregazionale di Propaganda Fide "Mater Ecclesiae – Foyer Paolo VI" (Castel Gandolfo, Rome)	2(3)		25	
Comunità "Madre Ersilia Canta" dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice (Rome)	1(3)		14	
Corso sul Carisma della famiglia Paolina (Rome)	1(3) (mixed group)		8	1
Total	3(9)	5(15)	47	61
	9(27)		108	

In the quantitative phase (March-June 2021), during the administration online of the Questionnaire, the heads and the leaders of the formation in the 615 ICL present in Italy were contacted: through the Secretary of "USMI Nazionale", 409 Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life and, through the Secretary of "CISM Nazionale", 206 male ones. Each Institute was reached by an email containing a brief presentation of the project, a request for information about the possible existence of a learning community in Italy characterized by a certain plurality of nationality of its members, and an invitation to circulate the Questionnaire to the members of their community asking them to participate anonymously, compiling it online. The invitation was sent twice to each ICL, in the months of March and April 2021. Of the 206 male ICL none replied.

When contacted directly, the male ICL who had participated at focus groups (from now on FG), where only some of the community were part of FG, replied positively to the distribution of the Questionnaire, but we don't have an exact number of their members in the period of its administration online (March-June 2021). The places of reference are: "Casa di formazione degli Oblati Maria Immacolata" of Vermicino (Rome), STI-PIME and "Casa di Formazione del Noviziato dei padri Comboniani", of Napoli. Apart from the last, the first three had already been reached through the communication with University Institutions, all of these participating as students.

Of the 409 female institutes contacted, 20 replied: 9 stated that their Institutions did not meet the criteria of the research (due to absence of a formative community, or the existence of a mono-national community membership, or formative communities based outside Italy), 11 gave their consent to distribute the Questionnaire within 13 communities of people in formation. Another 2 ICL, having got to hear about the research, expressed their willingness to distribute the Questionnaire³⁸.

It is not possible to establish the number of questionnaires compiled from the congregations involved because information about ICL provenance has not been collected for reasons of respect for privacy.

Tab. 8 – Number of Congregations and members reached (quantitative phase)

Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (13)	No. formative communities	No. members
Apostole del Sacro Cuore di Gesù	1	9 juniors
Dimesse Figlie di Maria Immacolata	1	3
Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice	2	24 novices
Figlie del Sacro Cuore di Gesù S. Teresa Verzeri	1	4
Figlie di S. Maria della Provvidenza (Don Guanella)	1	34 consecrated women (of whom 26 sisters, 7 juniors, 1 novice)
Francescane Missionarie del Sacro Cuore	1	10 juniors
Francescane Missionarie di Gesù Bambino	2	24
Mantellate Serve di Maria	1	3
Sorelle della Misericordia (Verona)	1	4
Sorelle Ministre della Carità (Trecate, Novara)	1	4
Suore Operaie della S. Casa di Nazareth	2	8 postulants 11 novices
Missionarie di San Carlo Borromeo	1	10
Figlie della Carità di S. Giovanna Antida Thouret	/	/
Total	15	148

9

Research methodology

From the outset of the project, given the complexity of the context, the reference population and the combination of research approaches – ethnographic, sociological and pedagogic – it was decided to adopt an exploratory approach: the idea was to use an investigative methodology which would be efficacious in bringing together a variety of learning situations and that would activate the interaction of educational processes in multicultural contexts on the part of those who activate and study these processes. The action-research approach³⁹, chosen by the team over other possible models, refers to Kurt Lewin’s original model, which is characterized by three principal elements: a) combining action and reflection, b) participatory research, c) directed to producing a change and an improvement⁴⁰. Participatory and learning dynamics were activated in various stages with the main aim of identifying, analysing and also improving a given situation through the involvement of each individual protagonist in a specific context, should this be the extended research team, the Institutions involved and the single members of the academic community and the ICL communities who adhered to the project.

The dynamics of investigation and self-analysis with a view to change were linked and consciously combined and monitored in order to activate knowledge, awareness and to incentivize evaluation, decision-making and action: it was expected we would see effects both during and after the participation in the project (effects which, however, we do not identify and document here). The entire project was intended to instigate a process oriented to the development and dissemination of knowledge and competences as well as to a specific *empowerment* for future action which could take place at both a personal and institutional level.

The action-research-training process unfolded in various phases: the building of the group, the training of its members, the creation and revision of the instruments to

be used and their application in the qualitative and quantitative phases, and finally, the analysis and presentation of results. All of this assumed educational value (even if in different ways and to different extents) for all the members in the sense that it had an impact on the system of group beliefs, knowledge and values, at the levels of the restricted team and the enlarged research team, and all those who participated in the focus groups, the interviews, and the Questionnaire.

In the months between March and September 2018 there were numerous extended team training meetings in preparation for the conducting of the focus groups, as has been described in the first part of this paper. No less, during the whole itinerary, meetings and work sessions both in person and online with the restricted team were taking place. The path was articulated in four main phases (1. constitution of the group, 2. design and preparation of the research, 3. participation and activation of the focus groups, the interviews and other activities, and the administration of the online Questionnaire) which basically followed the original procedural model of the action-research process proposed by Bart Cunningham (Tab. 9). In every phase monitoring and evaluation took place, achieved principally through participant observation and the collection of documentation during the various moments of verification and assessment⁴¹.

Tab. 9 – The phases in the action-research process

Phases	Actions	Time frame
1. Constructing the group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reciprocal knowledge (motivation, interests, aims) among the members of the restricted and enlarged team. – Identification of common objectives and methodology. – Construction of the theoretical background and practice (training and self-training). – Intermediary evaluation. 	Sep. 2017 Sep. 2018 June-Oct. 2019
2. Planning the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Definition of the general idea and the research focus. – Needs analysis (preparation of instruments, search, analysis of results). – Programming and organization of the action. – Intermediary evaluation. 	Sep. 2017
3. Action Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Activation of the <i>qualitative</i> survey (focus group, narration of critical incidents). – Activation of the <i>quantitative</i> survey (<i>Questionnaire online</i>) – Intermediary evaluation. 	Sep. 2018 Jan. 2020 Mar.-June 2021
* Monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Preparation of the monitoring instruments – Description, analysis and presentation of results in International Conference – Preparation of the final <i>Report</i> – Final Evaluation 	Sep. 2020 Feb. 2022

* *Monitoring and evaluation took place throughout all the phases.
The detailed timeline is reported in Tab.10.*

As indicated in Tab. 9, monitoring and evaluation took place in all the preceding phases: the process is cyclical, so allowing the passage or return to another phase, and open to another research development, to action and training, in continuity or discontinuity with preceding actions. In Table 10, which shows the timeline for the main phases of the action-research itinerary, for example, we see how the constitution of the group started in September 2017 for the directive team, and how it was followed, starting in January 2018 till September 2018 with the formation of the enlarged team.

Tab. 10 – Number of focus groups and ICL community participants (qualitative phase)

Action	2017		2018				2019					2020*				2021-2022				
	Sep-Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb-Apr	May-July	Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Feb	Mar-May	June	July-Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan	Feb-Mar	June-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Apr	May-Ag	Sep-Dec	Jan-Mar
Selection and construction of the directive team and description of the Project of educational action-research	█	█	█																	
<i>Qualitative phase:</i> Preparation of the analysis instruments: interviews and <i>focus group</i> drafts		█	█	█																
Selection and training of the enlarged team			█	█	█	█														
Planning and organization of the FG and the interviews					█	█														
Execution of the meetings of the FC and interviews						█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█							
<i>Quantitative phase:</i> Start of work in the analysis of qualitative data and creation of Qs										█	█	█	█	█						
Translation, use of Qs <i>online</i> Contacts for the consignment of Qs												█	█	█	█	█	█			
Administration of Qs																	█	█		
Description and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data														█	█	█	█	█	█	
Preparation and staging of Conference Presentation of the research																			█	█
Editing and publication of the <i>Report</i> of the research and the proceedings of the Conference																			█	█

* In March 2020 the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic caused an interruption and a modification of planned timelines for the administration of the Questionnaire online, and, as a result, the date of the International Conference was moved.

The broken line located at March 2020 indicated the period in which it was necessary to interrupt the research field work and delay the administration of the Questionnaire. The process, as has already been said, therefore took longer than had been expected due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, but, even with certain limitations, it was still possible to achieve the targeted objectives. The involvement of people and institutions had allowed the creation of networks and knowledge which made it possible to hold the International Conference in November 2021. The event took place in Rome at the PUU and was widely attended.

In conclusion, the methodological approach of Action Research activated learning experiences which had “multiple effects” at various levels: a) the training/qualification of a group of research collaborators (a multidisciplinary coordination team of 5 researchers and an enlarged team of around 20 scholars and graduates belonging to a number of Institutions); b) the acquisition of knowledge, awareness and competence on the part of those who participated in the phases of the focus groups, interviews, the narration of ‘critical incidents’, as well as in the compilation of Questionnaire online⁴². For this reason, as mentioned previously, to describe the project, the three terms *action*, *research* and *training* were chosen in order to highlight the process through which a change/transformation in all participants through action and research could be realized.

10

Method, dimensions of analysis and data collection instruments

This project integrated the approaches, instruments, and the qualitative and quantitative analytical methods used in *Mixed Methods Research*⁴³. In the data collection phase we decided to integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches rather than treat them as two distinct alternatives, as can be seen in the contributions of Fiorenza Deriu⁴⁴, Nina Deliu⁴⁵ and Enrica Ottone⁴⁶ in this volume. This choice allowed us to go beyond the limits of a purely qualitative or quantitative approach and to combine the strong points of each methodology, so leading to a deeper and multifaceted understanding of the phenomena under review. Mixed methods are particularly useful to address the issues posed by complex investigations (such as this project) and add to the validity of the results obtained. This methodology allowed us to analyse, from various viewpoints and with different instruments, complex questions (the interpretation of the concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism, the opportunities and problems/challenges of cohabitation in multicultural training communities, operative intercultural competences), which were the targets of this present study, in conjunction with understanding the nature of the particular contexts observed. Not only, the phase of the survey conducted using qualitative instruments also provided essential elements for the construction of the structured Questionnaire with which to better focus on the research hypotheses.

Multi-level conceptualization guided the identification of relevant hypotheses for which empirical data could be collected. This is summarized in Table 11. The survey utilizes a series of factors of various kinds, which, despite belonging to different levels of analysis, by their very complexity place the concepts of multiculturalism, interculturalism and intercultural competences within a process of social production.

The application of the methodology of the Action Research with participatory dynamics and of an educational type led the research team to choose to activate a plural process of investigation and to combine both qualitative and quantitative instruments, as seen in Table 11. The instruments used were the following:

- a. *participant observation*;
- b. the focus group (using a system which consisted of from 2 to three meetings activated by facilitators for each group);
- c. the in-depth *interviews* aimed at significant testimonies;
- d. the *narration of ‘critical incidents’*;
- e. the structured *questionnaire* with closed questions, in 9 languages⁴⁷.

The implementation of these instruments lets us identify, analyse and improve the participatory mode of the given situation through the involvement of every single protagonist, whether they be researcher or subject of the research (students, teachers, trainers, and/or members of the ICL) who belonged to the formative communities who adhered to the project.

Tab. 11 – Framework for the conceptualization of the analysis dimensions with indications of the instruments used

Dimensions of analysis and variables	Questionnaires (Question nos.)	Focus group (Question nos.)	Other: * ^ PO
Anagraphical characteristics			
age, gender, civil status, education qualification	1,2,3,4		*
country of origin, habitation status	5,12,13		*
university attended	14,15		*
Biographical aspects in migration history			
residence abroad / in Italy, migration path	6,7,8		*
opportunities/problems in the process of inclusion	9,10,11	1.2, 1.3	
congregational belonging, experience in multicultural communities	37,38,39		
relational networks	59,60		
Multicultural cohabitation: opportunities/problems			
opportunities in multicultural co-habitation	21,43	1.2	*
problems in multicultural co-habitation	22-27,44-50	1.3, 3.1	*
relational climate in multicultural contexts	20,42		* PO
Internationalization in learning contexts			
internationalization of members	17,18,40,41		PO
multi-lingualism (communication, lessons, texts)	19,28,29,45	2.2, 2.3, 2.4	PO
plurality of training/didactic models	30,31,32,51,52,53	2.2, 2.3, 2.4	PO
Interculturality			
conceptualization of interculturality (and difference from multiculturalism)	33,54,58	1.1	PO
experience of interculturality	34,55	2.1	* PO
interculturality in training contexts	35,36,56,57	2.2, 2.3	PO
Intercultural competences			
knowledge, abilities, predispositions (behaviours etc.) to experience interculturality	61,62	3.2,	* ^ PO

Key: * = Form *Narration of Critical Incidents*; ^ = Form *Activity Sheet on The Competences...*;
PO= participant observation

The implementation of these instruments lets us identify, analyse and improve the participatory mode of the given situation through the involvement of every single protagonist, whether they be researcher or subject of the research (students, teachers, trainers, and/or members of the ICL) who belonged to the formative communities who adhered to the project.

10.1 Participant observation

Participant observation, a technique much-used in ethnographic research to gather information on the cultural processes at work in the contexts under examination, was used, combined with other techniques and instruments of qualitative or quantitative enquiry⁴⁸. However, this dimension was present and transversal from the beginning and it led to the collection of qualitative and quantitative data which comprised

“ethnographic notes”, useful for the conservation of the memory of what happened, in spoken or written form, by both the research team and, above all, in the contexts of the various units of analysis. Throughout all the phases of the action-research-training, in different forms and according to the phase, there was the direct involvement of the two main researchers of the situations under review. It is important to recognize that both researchers, Luca Pandolfi e Enrica Ottone, belong to an academic community involved in the project, and that Ottone is a member of a formative community of an ICL. The collection of the qualitative data used a variety of instruments: from written transcripts of the observations to the gathering and classification of documentation, paper, digital and multimedial, produced throughout all the phases of the research path. The unity existing among researchers meant an assiduous exchange, allowing those who wrote things down to contrast their point of view with others, to monitor the development of the research during all of its phases, and also to observe “from the back seat” the phenomena being studied, looking at it from the point of view of the participants. This does not detract from the recognition that we are always dealing with subjective interpretation, albeit rigorous and verified, and that observation is always a selective process.

Participant observation was experienced also by the extended team, particularly at the time of the focus groups meetings. Written notes containing the observations of both facilitators, one assuming the role of observer, were compiled for each meeting.

10.2 The focus groups and the individual interviews

The focus group is a discussion organized with a selected group of individuals in order to acquire opinions on a subject pertinent to the research. The term is often used interchangeably and as a synonym with *group interview*, but while the latter is a collection of single opinions, the focus group is characterized by a certain interactivity among participants and it is used also to collect the opinion of the group, not only that of individuals⁴⁹. In our case, especially at the beginning of the focus group, participation interaction (between 8 and 15 people per group) was limited: discussion was delayed initially so that everyone could be heard on a first round of question and response, then room was left for more chance of free interaction and expression. The procedure followed for the meetings is described in detail in the document entitled *The Three Focus Groups* to be found in the last part of this volume⁵⁰.

The group meetings focussed on three main themes, which are summarized in Table 12 below, and which are described in detail later.

Tab. 12 – Thematic focus of the focus groups (FG) and typology of participants

	First meeting FG	Second meeting FG	Third meeting FG
Thematic focus	<i>Multiculturalism and interculturality</i>	<i>Multiculturalism and education</i>	<i>Intercultural competences in multicultural education communities</i>
Questions investigated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Differences between multiculturalism and interculturality – Living in a multicultural community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities • problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Examples of interaction and exchange – Examples of existing institutional proposals to promote interaction and exchange 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Challenging situations – Intercultural competences
Number of questions	3	4	2 + a form on intercultural competences
Typology of participants	students, teachers, members of ICL	students, teachers, members of ICL	students, members of ICL

The **first meeting**, entitled *Multiculturalism and interculturalism*, focussed on revealing, “measuring” and evaluating the opinions, knowledge and the positions of the participants about the two key concepts of the research, *multiculturalism* and *interculturalism*, and the difference between them. In terms of the actions completed by the end of the first meeting, they can be defined as follows: the participants (and by extension, the institutions they belonged to), having shared their opinions on the three questions prepared for the first focus group (Table 13), and having explored the theme, became aware of their own opinions, knowledge and positions about the two key concepts of the research, *multiculturalism* and *interculturalism*, and the difference between them. They also revealed some of the opportunities and problematics which emerge in a multicultural context.

The **second meeting**, entitled *Multiculturalism and education*, focussed on revealing, “measuring” and evaluating the opinions, knowledge and the positions of the participants with regards to the relationship between multiculturalism and the learning path, both on a personal level and with regard to institutional training activity. In terms of the actions completed by the end of the second focus group, they can be defined as follows: the participants (and by extension, the institutions they belonged to), having shared their opinions on the four questions prepared for the second focus group (Table 13), became aware of their own opinions, knowledge and positions about multiculturalism as a more or less integral part of the formation process, both on a personal level as well as with regard to institutional training activity.

The **third meeting**, entitled *Intercultural Competences in Multicultural Education Communities*, was not attended by teachers but only students and members of the ICL training communities. It focused on revealing, “measuring” and evaluating the opinions and the positions of the participants about the competences they considered useful in order to live and learn in multicultural formative contexts. Two questions were included for discussion, together with a form on intercultural competences. In terms of the actions completed by the end of the third focus group, they can be defined as follows: the participants (and by extension, the institutions they belonged to), having shared their opinions on the two questions prepared for the third focus group (Table 13), and also having compiled the form, became aware of their own opinions and positions about the competences they considered useful in order to live and learn in multicultural formative contexts.

Tab. 13 – List of questions posed in the three focus group meetings by participant type

Focus Group	N.	Question	Type of Group
First Meeting	1	In your opinion, what is the difference between multiculturalism and interculturalism?	All
	2	The context in which you move (academic community or community of consecrated life) is a multicultural reality. When, and in what sense, is this an opportunity?	All
	3	The context in which you move is a multicultural reality. When, and in what sense, is this a problem?	All
Second Meeting	4	In the multicultural educational context in which you move (community of consecrated life) you interrelate daily with people whose culture is different from yours. Talk about some examples of interaction and exchange that you live here with people from cultures different from yours.	Members of ICL Communities
		In the multicultural educational context in which you move (academic community) you interrelate daily with people whose culture is different from yours. Talk about some examples of interaction and exchange that you live here with people from cultures different from yours.	Teachers and Students

	5	Thinking about your educational experience in the context you belong to, what kind of proposals are made by the people who head or manage this situation to promote multicultural interaction? Describe briefly.	Members ICL Communities
		We are in a multicultural educational context. How does this reality change your didactic provision (lesson content, language used in lessons, strategies and methodology, manuals and bibliographies required at examinations?) (proposals)	Teachers
		We are in a multicultural educational context. How does this reality change the didactic provision by the university (lesson content, language used in lessons, strategies and methodology, manuals and bibliographies required at examinations?) (proposals)	Students
	6	How do you evaluate the proposals which have been listed? Express your evaluation.	All
	7	If you could suggest other proposals, what would you indicate?	All
Third Meeting	8	What are the problems (or challenging situations) you meet up with in a multicultural formative community? In a note on a post-it, write down a problem you encounter with reference to the multicultural formative context to which you belong.	Members ICL Communities and Students
	9	Starting from the problems mentioned and your own experience in multicultural formative contexts, in your opinion what are the competences required today in order to react efficaciously and appropriately when you are in a relationship with people who have a language and a culture different from yours? Each one of you, describe the three aspects you consider to be the most useful on the form provided.	Members ICL Communities and Students

26 groups were formed in total and 65 focus groups meetings took place. 298 people were interviewed, distributed as follows: 92 university teachers and 98 university students, and 108 members of ICL formative communities. There were 13 participating Institutions, mostly located in Central Italy, but with some in the North and the South (Table 14).

Tab. 14 – Thematic focus of the focus groups (FG) and typology of participants

	University Teachers	University Students	Members ICL	Total
Participants	92	98	108	298
Groups	8	9	9	26*
Meetings organized per group	2	3	3	–
Meetings held (or focus groups)	12/16 organized (4 groups attended only one of the two organized meetings)	26/27 organized (1 group attended only two of the three organized meetings)	27/27 organized	65
Institutions / Communities	6		7	13

* Number of groups who attended at least one meeting.

The research was also designed to include individual interviews with educators and members of the communities of Consecrated Life, and with teachers and students. The structured interviews had an outline made up of 8 questions: the first six were the same for all interviewees, while the last 2 varied according to the type of interviewee. It remains to be said that the outline could be adapted to the interview sit-

uation, both in formulation and sequence. The questions reflect the aspects investigated in the focus groups with some slight differences (Table 15). 8 interviews took place, distributed as follows:

- 2 members of the communities of Consecrated Life (male)
- 5 educators from Institutes of Consecrated Life (4 male trainers and 1 female trainer)
- 1 teacher consecrated woman (female).

The way the interviews were conducted, their recording and transcription, as for the focus groups, was the responsibility of the facilitators (operators, observers, interviewers) during the training session: the completed forms and their entire content is reported in the last part of this volume⁵¹.

Tab. 15 – Interview questions

Questions	no. questions per type*			
	T	S	Tr	M
Often, in social analysis, in educational provision, in information dissemination or in the mass media, the words multiculturalism and interculturalism are used interchangeably and as synonyms. Do you detect a difference between the two, and if so, how do they differ?	1	1	1	1
We live in a multicultural reality. When, and in what way, is this an opportunity?	2	2	2	2
When, and in what way, is it a problem?	3	3	3	3
Have you ever experienced a communication or interrelational problem with a person belonging to a cultural tradition which is different from yours? Can you describe it briefly?	4	4	4	4
In your view, how can problematic situations like the ones you have described be overcome?	5	5	5	5
What kind of attention to multicultural interaction is included in the educational proposals made by the people who live in your situation? Can you describe them briefly?	6	6	6	6
We are in a multicultural context. How does this change your didactic provision (lesson content, language used in lessons and manuals, bibliographies required at examinations)?	7			
We are in a multicultural context. How is this reflected in your teachers' didactic provision (if you need to, give examples: lesson content, language used in lessons and manuals, bibliographies required at examinations)?		7		
We are in a multicultural context. How is this reflected in the choice of educators? (In their multicultural origin, for example, or the choice of people with solid multicultural experience, or in possession of intercultural skills.)			7	
We are in a multicultural context. How does this affect the organization of formation, thinking about your formative community of the consecrated life?				7
If you could make any suggestions to the Institution where you are a teacher or a student, what would you propose?	8	8		
If you could make any suggestions to the Institution where you are an educator, what would you propose?			8	
If you could make any suggestions to the community/congregation to which you belong about the issues we have talked about in this questionnaire, what would you propose?				8

* Key: T = Teacher; S = Student; Tr = Trainer of ICL; M = Member of community of ICL

During the training session it was shown how to proceed with the recording and the transcription of the dialogues of the focus groups and the individual interviews. The facilitators used the forms for the collection of data about participant information (gender, civil status, country of origin) together with some details about the times and

mode of the meetings. The files with the transcriptions and the observations were uploaded within 2 weeks of the holding of the meeting or the interview on an online space to which all members of the team had access⁵².

Starting in June 2019, the files containing the transcriptions and the attached forms were collected by the researchers and the work started on the revision, ordering and preparation for the processing phase. This was followed by a process of text analysis using the software *IramuteQ* and MAXQDA, basing our work on an interpretative model derived from *grounded theory*⁵³. The corpus of the 65 focus groups was very large, comprising 313,892 total tokens and 12,847 types⁵⁴. The in-depth analysis of the results obtained from the first question of the first type of *focus*, performed by Nina Deliu, should be carried out, also, for the other questions. The coding of the second *focus* on formative contexts was completed and concluded, but the report with the results has not been finalized. A description of the coding operative for the *corpus* of the questions of the second focus is included in the last part of this volume. This will be the subject of future analysis. The modification of the time frame for the reasons cited previously, but also the great amount of work involved in this type of qualitative investigation, has meant that only a part of this analysis has been completed, to date.

10.3 The questionnaire

In the second stage of the Action Research, with regard to the research focus, objectives and hypotheses, after a provisional initial analysis of the results gathered from the focus groups and from the data that emerged from the participant observation, a structured Questionnaire was compiled. Reflections on the data resulting from the qualitative phase led to the constitution of this empirical base: we introduced additional factors into several questions in the Questionnaire and their respective items, which had been underplayed during the phase of conceptualization of the problematics and the formulation of the hypotheses of the project.

The Questionnaire was drafted in Italian between June 2019 and December 2020, translated into 8 languages (English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, and Korean) between January and February 2020, and implemented online with *LimeSurvey* in December. In the month of January, 2021, as described in Luca Di Censi's contribution, this volume, the Questionnaire was tested in order to check for a series of factors linked to the questions which could lead to distortion (complexity or obscurity of the question, over-determination, under-determination, obtrusiveness): this was also carried out on the translations in the various languages. After a careful process of pre-testing, the definitive version of the Questionnaire, constituting 62 questions, was produced.

From January to February 2019 the work of organizing the phases of administration and contacting the Institutions had begun, but at the beginning of March, due to the restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic affecting Italy in this period and subsequent months, it was decided to interrupt the work and delay the administration of the Questionnaire. It was only possible to restart this phase a year later, from March and June 2021 (Table 10). Anyway, as we described in the first part of this paper, we believe the pandemic situation had a large impact on the number of people that we were able to reach. The survey produced 535 Questionnaire (of which 401 furnished answers to the section relative to the formative houses of the consecrated life, and 469 to ecclesiastical academic institutions⁵⁵. The structuring of the Questionnaire and the distribution of the questions in relation to the dimensions of analysis and the item variables are described in Table 11. The processing and the presentation of the results was done by Luca Di Censi⁵⁶.

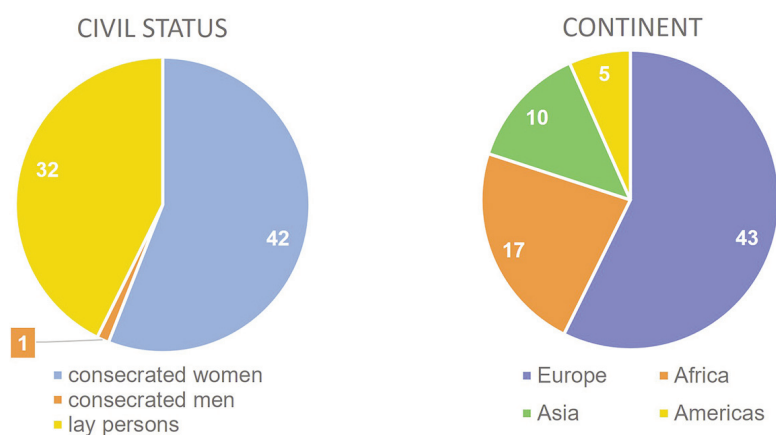
10.4 Narrating 'critical incidents'

This instrument consists of a form containing instructions for the written composition of a story. It makes use of the methodology of the narration of 'critical incidents', previously used in other kinds of research in both Italian and international contexts. The form, entitled *A Challenging Situation in a Multicultural Context*, describes the task to complete individually in the various phases, and provides a frame for the identification and the detailed description of an episode perceived as being challenging.

The form was introduced in the first phase of qualitative analysis, and the task was presented to the participants of the third meeting of the focus group and to a group of students from PFSEA in a period covering 2018 to 2021. Each participant was asked to tell a story in written form, providing a brief description of a situation or an event which was a challenge to deal with.

This is intended not only in the sense of a problematic incident or event (something unusual, disturbing, or irritating which could have created misunderstanding, problems or conflict); it could also be an episode of efficacious and positive interaction and exchange in a multicultural context (something experienced by the protagonist as pleasantly surprising and positive)⁵⁷. In total, with the guide of a tutor, 75 students completed the task (42 lay persons and 33 consecrated men and women), coming from 23 countries in 4 continents (Graph. 2). The activity consisted in a guided path through moments of individual reflection, comparison and exchange with the facilitator and colleagues⁵⁸.

Graph. 2 – Distribution of the 75 participants by civil status and continent



The analytical procedure of the 75 written stories from the participants required a qualitative approach which was similar to the one used for the analysis of the transcription of the focus groups. The database of the stories is relatively small, but can still appropriately be treated by the electronic textware (MAXQDA e *Iramuteq*): the corpus of the 75 narratives consists of 44,384 total tokens and 3,326 types. The analysis of the material, carried out by Enrica Ottone, revealed three categories of types of challenging situations which could result in 'critical incidents' in learning contexts, in community life and in work/mission realities. These enabled us to explore the competences used by the participants, the impact of immediate reactions, the force of emotions, and the effects of choices and actions⁵⁹.

Conclusion

The general objective of this research project was to understand the transformations in people which occurred or were absent with regard to the learning experiences, and the intercultural competences developed, in those living in formative contexts with a high level of multiculturality. During the course of the four years dedicated to action-research-training, we were able to collect a large quantity of qualitative and quantitative data, which have only been partially analysed in this *Report*, as we have explained previously: we are fully aware that our work hasn't finished with the publication of this volume.

We have come to know many people and processes in multicultural educational contexts and we have become more cognizant of the opportunities, the limits and the open challenges; we have reflected on the opportunities in training to develop intercultural competences and the roads which have been opened up and need to be opened up in the future. We have also tested out the usefulness of a series of instruments. Walking together we have discovered a path, by the side of others already created, and we have grown together in knowledge, understanding and intercultural sensibility, travelling with many other people who were already on the path.

The obtained results and presented in this *Report* have demonstrated the need to continue to investigate educational dimensions: we have known for some time that interculturality is *an obligatory way and a point of no return*⁶⁰, but we have also come to realize that we have a lot to learn in order to achieve translating this awareness into choices and institutional learning itineraries which go beyond improvisation, and which are fully integrated into formation contexts at various levels of formality, some more formal, some less so.



Endnotes

1. A summarized report of the research project, *International Sisters in the United States*, in English and Spanish, can be found on the Internet site of the GHR Foundation, a philanthropic foundation based in Minneapolis (MN) at the behest of Gerald and Henrietta Rauenhorst, who financed both the American research and the one described here. The link to the English version of the research summary is the following: http://www.ghrfoundation.org/uploads/3/1/3/1/31315939/international_sisters_study_-_ghr.pdf. The research was published in M. JOHNSON – M. GAUTIER – P. WITTEBERG – T.T. DO, *Migration for Mission: International Catholic Sisters in the United States*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY 2019.
2. Cf K. MAHONEY, “To Look More Closely”, in E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education in Multiculturalism, Education to Interculturality: In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy*, Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2023, 9-10.
3. Cf. F. RUGGE (ed.), *L'internazionalizzazione della formazione superiore in Italia. Le università*, CRUI 2018. In <https://www2.cruir.it/cruir/cruir-rapporto-inter-digitale.pdf> (19/02/2022).
4. One example is the PFSE, Rome, where research into intercultural education started in the 1990s thanks to the work of professor Hsiang-Chu Ausilia Chang. Cf. H.-C.A. CHANG – M. CHECHIN, *L'educazione interculturale. Prospettive pedagogico-didattiche degli Organismi internazionali e della Scuola Italiana*, LAS, Roma 1996; H.-C.A. CHANG, *Pontificia Facoltà di Scienze dell'Educazione "Auxilium": un'istituzione internazionale "laboratorio" di formazione interculturale*, “Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione” 45 (2007) 3, 90-97.
5. The course was created by UISG: <http://www.internationalunionsuperiorsgeneral.org>; <https://archive.is/eujRE>. News about it was published in the daily newspaper *Agensir*: <https://www.agensir.it/quotidiano/2020/12/18/vita-religiosa-uisg-un-corso-di-formazione-online-su-interculturalita-e-leadership>; <https://archive.is/Duchb>.
6. USG – 89th Assembly of 27 May 2017 entitled *Il discernimento vocazionale in un mondo interculturale* (<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1eTcYhSAhYkRtliqA9u4UK9OQ5F5llu8i>) Very interesting papers (translated in several languages) include: A. Sosa [Superior General of the Society of Jesus], *Interculturalidad, Catolicidad y Vida Consagrada* (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZQr4wYnmrk6OtnKx1JnKpxnwNibTJHT/edit>) and M. WEBER [SVD Rector at the Divine Word Theologate, Chicago, IL], *Vocational Discernment in an Intercultural World* (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zcGXXks2srOq1Nae6xPwbZFW-UiINvzz/edit>) (14/02/2022).
7. J.P. KIRBY, *Intercultural Competence for Religious Communities: Models, Gauges and Guides*, Paper given at the SEDOS Residential Seminar, Rome 2016 (<https://docplayer.net/129514711-Intercultural-competence-for-religious-communities-models-gauges-and-guides.html>) (26/02/2022).
8. The *Service of Documentation and Study on Global Mission* (SEDOS) is a scholarly forum for the understanding and documentation of the experiences of catholic missionaries, born during the second Vatican Council, in which around 84 ICL male and female missionaries participated, SEDOS has always been committed to promoting, documenting and encouraging open and courageous critical reflection on major themes relevant to ecclesiastical and global frontiers. Cf. <https://sedosmission.org>; <https://archive.is/qG5GR>.
9. Two extensive publications of 2015 are dedicated to the study and reflection on multicultural life and action of ICL, and contain various contributions from the catholic world. Cf. L.T. STANISLAUS – M. UEFFING (eds.), *Intercultural Living*, vol. I, Sankt Augustin, New Delhi 2015 and Id. (eds.), *Intercultural Mission*, vol. II, Sankt Augustin, New Delhi 2015.
10. Cf. CONSIGLIO GENERALE MISSIONARI COMBONIANI, *L'interculturalità nella comunità comboniana*, 1999. In: <https://www.comboni.org/app-data/files/allegati/2064.pdf> (14/02/2022).

11. Cf. PROVINCIA ITALIANA MISSIONARI COMBONIANI, *Missione e interculturalità. La prassi interculturale come sfida missionaria*, “Quaderni di Limone” 11 (2018). (http://www2019.laicomboniani.it/download/simposio_comboniano/Quaderni%20di%20Limone_2018.pdf).
12. Cf. AA.VV., *L'interculturalità: nuovo paradigma della Missione*. Conference proceedings, Istituto Missioni della Consolata – Rome 4-7 December 2009, Edizioni Missioni Consolata, Roma 2010.
13. See an interesting contribution by S.Y. RAJA, *Inter-culture and Multi-culture. Their Implication in the Life and Mission of the Sons of Divine Providence*, “Messaggi di Don Orione” 50 (2018) 9-26 and S. DABIRÈ, *Multiculturalité et interculturalité de la vie religieuse Orioniste en contexte africain*, “Messaggi di Don Orione” 50 (2018) 27-50.
14. From 18 to 22 November 2019, at Collevaleza, the conference *Insieme senza esitare* took place. *La Vita Consacrata fra diversità generazionali e culturali*, promoted by “Conferenza Italiana Superiori Maggiori” (CISM) and the “Unione delle Superiori Maggiori Italiane” (USMI) with the collaboration of “Ufficio Nazionale per la pastorale delle vocazioni” of the “Conferenza Episcopale Italiana” (CEI) [Episcopal Conference of Italy]. The various presentations and workshops are contained in a publication where two contributions are from two members of our research team Cf. L. PANDOLFI, *Cultura e transculture, tra comunità di vita e comunità di pratica nella vita consacrata*, in Quaderni CISM, *Insieme senza esitare, la vita consacrata fra diversità generazionali e culturali*, Ancora editrice, Milano 2020, 80-92 and M. CATTANEO, *Tra immaginario e reale: le dinamiche fraterne nella diversità culturale e generazionale*, in Quaderni CISM, *Insieme senza esitare, la vita consacrata fra diversità generazionali e culturali*, Ancora editrice, Milano 2020, 93-101.
15. P. MILETO, *Camminare la diversità: la vita consacrata nella sfida della multiappartenenza etno-culturale nel mondo in globalizzazione*, 2018; <https://www.comboni.org/contenuti/109905>; <https://archive.is/1tpw8>.
16. Team biographical note: in April 2020 Elisabetta expired from Covid-19. It was a significant loss for us.
17. This will be picked up on later. Cf. L. PANDOLFI, *Formation in Multiculturality, Formation towards Interculturality: Challenges to Embrace and Necessary Transformations*, in E. OTTONE – L. PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education in Multiculturality, Education to Interculturality: In Ecclesiastical Institutions of Higher Education and in Formation Communities for Catholic Consecrated Life in Italy*, Urbaniana University Press, Città del Vaticano 2023, 235-264.
18. The bibliography related to cultural anthropological, psycho-social and socio-political reflections is wide and far-reaching. Some texts, which have influenced us, include: M. DE CERTEAU, *La culture au pluriel*, Union Générale d'Éditions, Paris 1974; U. HANNERZ, *Transnational connections: culture, people, places*. Routledge, London – New York, NY 1996 (It. transl: *La diversità culturale*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2001). We have provided a broad summary: cf. L. PANDOLFI, *Universali antropologici e teorie del pluralismo*, “Euntes Docete” 58 (2005) 1, 39-69. Id., *Vivere il pluralismo. Sfide e diritti di cittadinanza*, “Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione” 48 (2010) 2, 230-240.
19. Cf. L. PANDOLFI, *Animazione interculturale cooperativa*, in Id. (ed.), *Interculturalidad cooperativa. Il Progetto/1*, Aracne Ed., Roma 2010 e Id., *Pluralità e transculture nella comunicazione contemporanea*, “Euntes Docete” 64 (2011) 1, 11-35. For an interesting synthesis cf. P. BALBONI, *Parole comuni, Culture diverse. Guida alla comunicazione interculturale*, Marsilio Editore, Venezia 1999. Balboni distinguishes macro-areas, which he defines as “domains”, such as *social relationships, social organization, the family and the home, the city, the school, the mass media*; for each of these domains he proposes a wide series of locations, behaviours, prospects, modes and specific, transforming representations. We also recognize the contribution of G. HOFSTEDE, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, McGraw-Hill, London 1991, where the author proposes that all culturally-marked subjects are in possession of a kind of *software*, not rigid, but flexible, even if intrinsic, which processes linguistic and intercultural social interactions.
20. Cf. A. FANTINI, *Exploring and Assessing Intercultural Competence* (CSD Research Paper No. 07-01), Washington University – Center for Social Development, St. Louis, MO 2007; P. REGGIO – M. SANTERINI (eds.), *Le competenze interculturali nel lavoro educativo*, Carocci, Roma 2014.

21. Cf. in E. OTTONE, *Intercultural Competences under Construction: Qualitative Analysis of Narration of Critical Incidents by a Group of University Students*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 184. The definition of intercultural competences is built starting from the vision of competence presented in M. PELLERÉY, *Le competenze individuali e il portfolio*, RCS Libri, Milano 2004, 12.23-64.
22. Cf. A. PORTERA (ed.), *Competenze interculturali. Teoria e pratica nei settori scolastico-educativo, giuridico, aziendale, sanitario e della mediazione culturale*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2013; D.K. DEARDORFF, *Manual for Developing Intercultural Competence*, UNESCO Publishing/Routledge Focus, New York, NY 2020.
23. Cf. H. DE WIT – F. HUNTER, *The Future of Internationalization of Higher Education in Europe*, “International Higher Education” 83 (2015) 3; H. DE WIT, *Le università e il ruolo dell’internazionalizzazione*, “Vita e Pensiero” 93 (2012) 6, 117-122.
24. During the research, when contacting various male or female ICL, we were told about the choice not to have formative houses in Rome or in Italy, about the substantial reduction in the number of candidates for the Consecrated Life, and the location of their training itineraries (postulancy, novitiate, juniorate, etc.) in non-Italian and non-European contexts, with a view to living more immediately a presence/training in a plural world and experience of mission *loci*.
25. Cf. J.R. FRAENKEL – N.E. WALLEN – H.H. HYUN, *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education*, McGraw-Hill Education, New York, NY 2019, (It. transl.: *Come progettare e valutare la ricerca in educazione*, LAS, Roma 2019, 171-ss.).
26. Cf. L. DI CENSI, *The Intercultural Challenge in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities: Results of the Quantitative Survey*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 160.
27. 20 ICL communities participated in a definitive and verifiable way (7 for the qualitative phase and 20 for the quantitative phase). Probably in the diffusion of the questionnaires online many members of the ICL formative communities – often students of the academic communities involved (6 for the qualitative phase and 10 for the quantitative phase) – could have compiled it. Many others had news of it and had access to it. It is important to note that in such a vast population and with the characteristics relevant to the project, the proposal of Action Research with an educational dimension requires an aware and participatory acceptance on the part of the institutions contacted. Many of these, whose dynamics and reasons are commented on in the final part of this report, demonstrated a lot of resistance, mainly indifference and in some cases explicit opposition to their involvement and to the diffusion of posting of the items of the research to the trainees of the same institution. And so, besides the evident fact that every sample on which a survey is based is a part (hopefully a representative one) of the observed population, in our case it was extremely difficult to count on the numbers and the sampling hypotheses imagined in the design phase. So the places contacted and finally involved in the research, not always, but often, were the result of a long work of mediation and personal communication, constructed on relationships, associations and networks with friends and colleagues. This participatory dynamic was important in widening the network of collaboration and also the fact that members of the directing and extended team came from and operated, in part, from inside the population under review.
28. In the second phase other Roman pontifical universities appear, not contacted by the research team but attended by consecrated men and women present in the ICL formative houses which had been and who had compiled the Questionnaire.
29. Other changes happened during the course of the research due to the restrictions which were brought in consequent to the Covid-19 pandemic.
30. DI CENSI, *The Intercultural*, 161.
31. Cf. FRAENKEL – WALLEN – HYUN, *Come progettare*, 946-947.
32. The Questionnaire and the *Activity Sheet: The competences that are useful in multicultural training contexts* were compiled anonymously and it is not possible to arrive at the total number of the people involved in the research. We can hypothesize that a certain number of those who completed the Questionnaire also took part in one or more phases of the research conducted with qualitative instruments. Therefore, it is not possible to calculate exactly the total number of people involved in one or more phases of the research. The survey, at a rough estimate, certainly included a minimum of 650 people.

33. An up-to-date list of the ecclesiastical institutions of higher education of the Holy See (Universities, Faculties and specialized Institutes) is available at <http://www.educatio.va/content/cec/it/istituzioni—facolta.html>; <https://archive.is/d9q6c>.
34. Cf. DI CENSI, *The Intercultural*, 167.
35. The national Secretary of the USMI collaborated with the research both in the qualitative and the quantitative phases. The two regional branches, in Lazio and Sicily, even though contacted in both phases, did not adhere to the project.
36. Cf. The *Activity Sheet* in Part five of this Volume: *The Three Focus Groups*, 356-363.
37. The form was administered to: 80 consecrated men and women participants at the “Convegno Annuale di formazione e pastorale vocazionale” CISM/USMI and “Ufficio di Pastorale Vocazionale” (Collevalenza, Perugia, March 2019); 50 young consecrated men and women at the “Corso sul carisma della famiglia Paolina”, (Rome, 17 November 2018); 90 novices of the “noviziato inter-congregazionale” at Marino (Rome) in March 2019; 55 students of the “Corso di qualifica in Formatrici e Formatori nell’ambito della vita consacrata della Facoltà”, PFSEA (Rome, 13 November 2018).
38. One of the two ICL, however, did not communicate the number of communities and the number of people in training who were reached.
39. The action-research-training approach followed here shares some aspects with *Design Based Research* (DBR), which was developed in the 1990s with the studies of Ann Brown and Alan Collins: it consists of a systematic, but at the same time flexible, investigative methodology appropriate for real learning and training contexts and which presupposes an interaction between researchers and the project previously designed by them with the communities and/or people in formation who participate in the project. To go further into the differences between the two approaches cf. T. ANDERSON – J. SHATTUCK, *Design-based Research: A Decade of Progress in Education Research?*, “Educational researcher” 41 (2012), 1, 16-25.
40. Cf. E. OTTONE, *Diritto all’educazione e processi educativi scolastici. Un percorso di ricerca-azione in una scuola secondaria di secondo grado*, LAS, Roma 2006, 103-108.
41. Cf. B. CUNNINGHAM, *Action Research. Toward a Procedural Model*, “Human Relations” 29 (1976) 3, 215-238; OTTONE, *Diritto*, 117.
42. For example, several members of a group of students, at the conclusion of the administration of the Questionnaire online, came into the classroom, and in a brief moment of discussion, expressed their satisfaction with their experience and said that the questions of the Questionnaire had made them think about certain aspects of their experience in multicultural contexts which they had never previously thought about.
43. Cf. J.W. CRESWELL – V.L.P. CLARK, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, Sage publications, Thousand Oaks, CA 2017; S. MAUCERI, *Qualità nella quantità. La survey research nell’era dei Mixed Methods*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2019.
44. Cf. F. DERIU, *Intercultural Competences in Multicultural Education and Formation Communities: Key Concepts Identified by the Text Analyses of Focus Groups*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 70-112.
45. Cf. N. DELIU, *Multiculturality and Interculturality: A Qualitative Analysis of the Perspective of Focus Group Participants*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 113-158.
46. Cf. OTTONE, *Intercultural*, 182-234.
47. The listed instruments are described in the *Appendices* of this volume.
48. Cf. G. D’AGOSTINO, *L’osservazione partecipante. Un topos metodologico problematico*, in V. MATERA (ed.), *Storia dell’etnografia. Autori, teorie, pratiche*, Carocci, Roma 2020, 85-110, and particularly G. LAPASSADE – V.A. D’ARMENTO, *L’etnosociologia*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2009.
49. Cf. A. GIBBS, *Focus Groups and Group Interviews*, in R. COE – M. WARING – L.V. HEDGES – J. ARTHUR (eds.), *Research Methods & Methodologies in Education*, SAGE Publications, London 2017², 190.

50. Cf. *The Three Focus Groups*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 356-363.
51. Cf. *Interview Outlines* and *The Three Focus Groups*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education*, 356-363.
52. A course was set up using the Moodle platform of the PFSEA (<https://didatticaonline.pfse-auxilium.org/>; <https://archive.is/AbXYn>) to encourage the communication and exchange of information among the enlarged team and for the collection of transcriptions and relative documentation of the focus groups and the interviews.
53. The text preparation work for the qualitative analysis phase was completed by the authors of this paper. Prof. Deriu provided us with the information for the creation of the files which would be compatible with the textware *IramuteQ*. Later, the text documents were modified in order to be analysed also with the software MAXQDA, which uses different criteria. Prof. Nina Deliu worked in this second phase, together with the authors, and in collaboration with Francesca Fratarcangeli. For more details about the methodology and the textware used in the qualitative analysis see the contributions of Deriu e Deliu, this volume.
54. Cf. DERIU, *Intercultural*, 73.
55. Cf. DI CENSI, *The Intercultural*, 162.
56. Cf. *ivi*.
57. Cf. OTTONE, *Intercultural*, 186.
58. Cf. *Tool for the Narration of Critical Incidents*, in OTTONE – PANDOLFI (eds.), *Education* 364-365.
59. Cf. OTTONE, *Intercultural*, 182-234.
60. Cf. A. PEROTTI, *Plaidoyer pour l'interculturel*, Editions du Conseil de l'Europe, Strasbourg 1994 (It. transl., *La via obbligata dell'interculturalità*, Editrice Missionaria Italiana, Bologna 1994).