

ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL INEQUALITIES: TEACHING AND INVESTIGATIVE THEORY AND PRACTICE

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Abstract

The proposal of this communication is to present a living of teaching innovation in which the teaching of Sociology is linked to the research developed in the European project *INCASI: International Network for Comparative Analysis of Social Inequalities*, of which the teachers are part. The teaching experience is being carried out in the Sociology subject, with first-year students, of the degree of Management and Public Administration, of the Faculty of Law, of the University of Barcelona. The central axis of the work developed by the students is to conduct an exploratory sociological research on one social inequality and observe and devise innovative policies to counteract the inequalities. Thus, the students carry out a group research on one of the social inequalities of INCASI's own analysis (employment, labor market, education, family life, migration, gender, etc.), allowing the students to have a direct contact with a real project. Thus, the students can, on the one hand, get in touch with the scientific production and with the members of the project and, on the other hand, to evaluate the outputs of the student's groups by the Academic Committee of INCASI. The best papers of the students will be published on the European project website.

The teaching-learning objectives of this teaching experience are the following: (1) relate basic theoretical knowledge of the sociological discipline with a social phenomenon research; (2) practice and acquire various fundamental learning skills, both in the academic context and in the professional context, such as the scientific and technological competences, communication skills and teamwork, all from a reflective and critical position; (3) become aware of the transfer of knowledge richness of the results obtained in the society investigation through the creation of a website.

The teaching innovation experience is developed in two academic courses: 2017/2018 and 2018/2019. In the first year, the thematic axis on which the project is supported, the exploration of social inequalities, takes place in the European context. In the second year, the same social inequalities already analyzed by the students, will still be followed up in the Latin American context for new groups of students. In this way, the results obtained from the student's work developed in the first academic year, as well as, the functioning dynamics in the classroom of the analysis of social inequalities investigated, are exposed in this communication.

Keywords: Social inequalities, Teaching innovation, Theory and research practice, Management and Public Administration, University of Barcelona.

1 INTRODUCTION

This communication presents an ongoing experience derived from a teaching innovation project accredited by the Research, Innovation and Improvement of Teaching and Learning Program of the University of Barcelona. The project consists in carrying out a sociological exploration of social inequality and in the search for social policies that are innovative in order to counteract the inequalities analyzed.

The experience of teaching innovation is developed in the subject of Sociology, with first-year students, the degree of Management and Public Administration, of the Faculty of Law, of the University of Barcelona. The project is applied in two academic courses: in the 2017-2018 academic year and, currently, in the 2018-2019 academic year. In the first year, Europe was the context of analysis of social inequalities and, in the current academic year, the analysis focuses on Latin America.

The teaching experience is based on three global teaching-learning objectives. The first, to relate the basic theoretical knowledge of Sociology with the research practice of social phenomena; in particular, those that are associated with a comparative research that is being carried out in the context of the INCASI project: International Network for Comparative Analysis of Social Inequalities (<http://incasi.uab.cat/>). The second, practice and acquire various fundamental learning skills, both in the university context and in the professional context, such as scientific competence, technology, communication skills, teamwork and creativity, all from a reflective position and review. And, the third, to become aware of the richness of the transfer of knowledge of the results obtained in the research to the Society through the creation of a web page.

A general statistical data on the profile of the graduate in Management and Public Administration (GAP) can be obtained by going to the latest survey of AQU (2017) [1] that interviewed students who graduated in 2014. Although this is not exactly the profile of the first year, gives a general idea of the students that are going to be configured in their graduation. Specifically, the profile of graduates of GAP of the UB is:

1. Mostly women (73%) with an average age of 28 at the end of their studies, who come from 80% of households where the parents have not had higher education. Of the total number of graduates, 3.3% are foreigners. During the degree, only 20% of those who have dedicated themselves to full-time study, while a large 80% did work (sporadic or not).
2. At the time of the survey, 96.7% were employed and 3.3% were unemployed. Of the employed, the vast majority carried out tasks appropriate to a university student (73.3%). This situation is linked to the fact that this is a degree where they are already working before graduating; in fact, 93.3% found work in less than 3 months (this value includes people who already had a job). However, contrary to what can be thought, the majority of graduates of GAP work in the private sector (56.7%) and the rest in the public sector. Fixed contracts have 53.3%, while 43.3% have temporary contracts. It is a career with little insertion as self-employed workers (3.3%). In general, they are satisfied with the current work (7.2 / 10).
3. With respect to training, they value (out of 10) of the career in a 7.1 the theoretical training, in 5.1 points the practical training. With respect to the utility/application of the knowledge obtained in the faculty and applied in their work they value 6.1 theoretical training and 5.5 practical training. They are happier with the university than with the career since 86.7% would repeat university and only 43.3% the degree.

The students of Sociology, subject of the first course, are divided into two groups (morning and afternoon) with around 60 students each. The afternoon group also has the peculiarity that one third of the students are doing the double university degree in Law-Management and Public Administration.

It is a profile of students, then, newly arrived at the University, with what this implies of the process of adaptation to the university context. We know from previous work carried out by groups of students of the GAP Sociology course in previous courses that a significant proportion of GAP students have not chosen this career as a first option, but to have the possibility to access to other careers in the next academic year, they are most interested in change of career because their court note did not allow them to access on it. This fact poses a challenge for the teaching staff since an effort must be made to maintain the attention and involve the students in the tasks performed, due to their low motivation for the GAP career.

Based on the extensive experience of teachers in the subjects involved in the project, the following learning gaps can be detected in students:

1. Low capacity to carry out an investigation, showing difficulties in the choice and delimitation of a topic for analysis, as well as in the search and selection of scientific information. Although they manage virtual environments and social networks, they are unaware those sites related to the scientific field, such as access to bibliographic databases, open systems of scientific journals and institutional repositories.
2. Low capacity for reflective and critical analysis of social reality, as well as, quite a few difficulties to assimilate the methodology inserted in the research process.
3. Inequality in oral communication skills and, greater generalized difficulty in writing.
4. Little experience of collaborative work.

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology proposed to carry out the work replaces a previous, more traditional one, which was applied in the classroom to develop a research work; thus, the innovative changes that stand out in the application of the teaching experience are the following:

1. The research process is partially adapted, giving importance to the scientific competence in some of its dimensions: to propose and design a sociological research, search and management of diverse information resources in accredited sources, to build a theoretical framework based on prominent authors in the areas of study, find innovative ways to deal with the inequality analyzed and devise an innovative proposal to counteract this inequality, which implies an exercise of critical reflection.
2. Knowledge transfer is completely transformed when requesting the creation of a web page that includes the results obtained.
3. More teaching space is granted to the practical sessions in which the work teams have to develop the research and the construction of the website in a computer classroom.
4. Another digital tool is requested, the construction of a video, which shows the development of the work, the innovative proposal and a reflection on the whole work carried out. As a whole, a shared space and knowledge transfer are created in both directions by linking the students' work with an active European research project, of which the teachers are a part.
5. Students' products are valued by recognizing and disseminating them in activities and in the digital platform of the INCASI project.

The INCASI project has objectives that link with scientific competence but also deals with training, deepens methodological aspects and above all gives supreme relevance to the innovation aspect, since there is a specific period of nine months within the project dedicated exclusively to the subject of INNOVATION. From the development of the analysis model that takes into account the labor and educational trajectories and social inequalities called AMOSIT (*Analytical Model of Social Inequalities and Trajectories*), new elements of reflection, study and debate are proposed, which will lead to establish new perspectives and innovative to address the general problem of research of social inequality, from a triple perspective: theoretical, methodological and social intervention. The different activities, research stays and products obtained in this stage aim to generate new ideas, propose innovative elements for research and guide the social policies that will culminate with the third international conference (2019), open to the participation of researchers, staff technical of governments and social policy makers, so that they collect ideas as well as concrete tools for their daily action that help to improve / elaborate policies and / or actions in order to face such social inequalities.

3 RESULTS

The results presented in this communication (still in the preliminary phase) correspond to those obtained during the past academic year 2017-2018, with the two groups of first-year students (morning and afternoon), of the subject of Sociology, of GAP. The total number of students participating in the teaching experience was 92, distributed among 20 groups of four or five people. Each group has selected a social inequality, among the axes of the INCASI Project, developing a work of sociological exploration of it, oriented to obtain information of various kinds, the theoretical analysis, the creation of an innovative way to counteract inequality, and the transfer of knowledge through the creation of a video and a web page.

The choice of social inequality, its delimitation and subsequent exploration has been carried out among the following thematic axes of the INCASI Project:

1. Inequalities in the labor market and work trajectories
2. Asymmetries in the relationship between training and employment
3. Inequalities in work and family life
4. Educational inequalities
5. Social and geographical inequalities, ethnicity and language
6. Social inequalities, migration and space
7. Uncertainty, strategies, resources and capabilities
8. Inequality of opportunities: intergenerational social mobility
9. Gender inequality

Of the previous thematic axes all have been analyzed by the groups of students, except the 7, being the most researched those related to educational inequalities, gender and migration. Although, these investigations have a cross-sectional nature, especially those that cover the subject of gender linked to the different levels of studies, the work environment and the family.

The sociological exploration of these social inequalities has been developed throughout the course following the following steps:

1. Selection, delimitation, definition and justification of social inequality.

2. Realization of a theoretical approach through the search of the outstanding authors in the subject.
3. Search for other secondary sources of information that allow us to show inequality from different sources: databases and audiovisual material.
4. To find out existing innovative ways to face the inequality and create a proper form of the group.

The complete analysis of each research and having it translated into a web page has been a challenge for all students, both for the novel way of building knowledge about a social inequality, and, for being the first time they developed a website. Overcoming the initial difficulties, all the groups completed their work successfully. The academic results have been satisfactory: seven of the groups have passed the work with a passing score and thirteen with excellent and excellent marks.

4 CONCLUSIONS

We are still in the process of implementing the project, therefore, the evaluation we can do is partial. First of all, we can say that the students of the 2017-2018 academic year have accomplished with the entire teaching-learning process and the results have been positive, since they have submitted the work according to the established rules and all the groups have been approved.

In the presented products (videos and webs) the students show involvement, a satisfactory level of research of the topics and that have developed the competences addressed successfully. Following the stated objectives, we can say that the experience of the first year shows that (1) they have successfully completed a topic that relates to the basic theoretical knowledge of the sociological discipline with a social phenomenon research; (2) that they have practiced and acquired various fundamental learning skills, both in the academic context and in the professional context, such as the scientific and technological competences, communication skills and teamwork, all from a reflective and critical position; (3) they have managed to become aware of the transfer of knowledge of the results obtained in the research to the society through the creation of a website.

On the other hand, at this moment, that means at the beginning of the second stage of the teaching-learning process of this project, it is very positive to account with the experience of the previous year, since the students of the 2018-2019 courses can better understand the requirements of the teachers, since they have web pages and videos that are concrete examples of the activity to be done, and this positively reverts to the willingness to carry out group work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We appreciate the support of RIMDA (Recerca, Innovació i Millora de la Docència i l'Aprenentatge) with de Project *Formas innovadoras para contrarrestar las desigualdades sociales (FINCODES)* (number 2017PID-UB/042), from Universitat de Barcelona. Añadiría que el Proyecto se hace/participan dos grupos de innovación docente consolidados de la UB: CEFOCID-COPOLIS. Centro de Formación Continua e Innovación Docente (Grupo Internacional e Interuniversitario Copolis. Bienestar, Comunidad y Control Social (GINDOC-UB/140) y GIDC-GAP. Grupo de Innovación docente consolidado de Gestión y Administración Pública (GINDOC-UB/054). Also, this article was elaborated in the context of INCASI Network, a European project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie GA No 691004 and coordinated by Dr. Pedro López-Roldán. "This article reflects only the author's view and the Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains".

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