

INTRODUCING DIVERSITY IN POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION? THE BRAZILIAN EXPERIENCE

INTRODUÇÃO DE DIVERSIDADE NA PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO? A EXPERIÊNCIA BRASILEIRA

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Abstract:

This essay examines the application of positive discrimination in admission processes of three Brazilian postgraduate programs in the field of Human Rights. By presenting this case, it intends to verify how such measures may benefit postgraduate education and research, as well as if they can directly contribute to the social development of countries characterized by a higher degree of marginalization and socioeconomic contrast. It brings furthermore some final considerations about the compatibility of positive discrimination with international declarations, as the World Declaration on Higher Education and the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development.

Keywords: Postgraduate. Education. Diversity. Brazil.

Resumo:

O presente artigo examina a aplicação de ações afirmativas nos processos seletivos de três programas brasileiros de pós-graduação em Direitos Humanos. Pretende-se, com isso, verificar como tais medidas podem beneficiar a educação e a pesquisa. Busca-se, ainda, discutir se tais medidas podem contribuir para o desenvolvimento social de países marcados por um alto grau de marginalização e contraste socioeconômico. Ao final, são feitas considerações sobre a compatibilidade de ações afirmativas com documentos jurídicos internacionais, como a Declaração Mundial sobre Educação Superior e a Declaração de Copenhagen sobre Desenvolvimento Social.

Palavras-chaves: Pós-graduação. Educação. Diversidade. Brasil.

Introduction

This paper aims at pointing out potential positive effects of a broader application of affirmative actions¹ for social development. It takes into account recent practices of positive discrimination, as adopted by three Brazilian public universities in the area of Human Rights. The originality of such measures lies on the fact that they are being used during admission processes for postgraduate courses (Master and PhD).

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¹ The expressions affirmative actions, positive actions and positive discrimination will be employed here as synonyms. Some authors, however, argue that positive actions and affirmative actions are different concepts. In this sense, CARUSO (2003, p. 341-342) affirms that “the alleged distinction lies in the fact that positive action is conceptually in tune with the principle of equality, while affirmative action is not. Positive action aims at leveling the field for all players. It favors traditionally discriminated categories of individuals by allowing them to compete on an equal footing, but it does not promise them victory”.

Along with the following considerations, exposed under a more theoretical point of view, it shall be basically verified if the broad application of affirmative actions in research and education may collaborate to the results expected from postgraduate research and indirectly to the social development of countries characterized by a higher degree of marginalization and socioeconomic diversity.

In order to reach these objectives, this paper includes, first, a brief presentation of the affirmative actions implemented in three postgraduate programs in Brazil, followed by a discussion on positive direct effects that human diversity may generate in the field of research production. It brings furthermore some considerations about the relation between affirmative actions, diversity and social development. Finally, some concerns about the compatibility of positive discrimination with international declarations adopted by the international community are presented.

Those topics are developed under the assumptions that: first, culture and personal experiences influence all kinds of educational institutions and also decision and policy-making processes; second, that upper levels of education are responsible for the formation of citizens and leaders, here understood as individuals who are able to change social reality through their words and actions; and, third, that many social groups are not duly represented in educational institutions, specially at the highest levels, what demands mechanisms to stimulate human variety in those atmospheres.

A bridge between education (including research), diversity and social development, here understood as the improvement of social conditions for all social groups within a certain society,² shall be constructed on the basis of those three assumptions.

Affirmative actions and research in Brazil

In 2005 the faculties of Law of three Brazilian public universities, the University of Sao Paulo, the Federal University of Para and the Federal University of Paraiba (hereinafter USP, UFPA and UFPB, respectively) founded research and postgraduate centers in the range of Human Rights. One of their most relevant focuses is to analyze, discuss and propose solutions for questions related to social exclusion.

In coherence with the pluralistic society where they are inserted, it was decided that such centers should apply affirmative actions for the selection of their

² According to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development (hereinafter Copenhagen Declaration), published in March 1995, as a result of the World Summit for Social Development organized by the United Nation, social development presupposes the improvement of quality of life of all people. "It requires democratic institutions, respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, increased and equal economic opportunities, the rule of law, the promotion of respect for cultural diversity and the rights of persons belonging to minorities, and an active involvement of civil society" (Introduction, paragraph 7).

researchers (postgraduate students). Therefore, USP approved a scoring system,³ which privileges hardly disabled, black and American-Indian candidates, as well as persons lying under the socioeconomic average standards.⁴ On the other hand, UFPB adopted quotas for black and American-Indians, while the UFPA established quotas for black, American-Indians and disabled individuals.⁵

All these measures were restricted to postgraduate courses regarding Human Rights and, in general, they do not exclude traditional phases of the admission process of candidates, based on meritocracy. Despite their soft character, these selection methods drew some attention from the public opinion, once they were considered quite innovative, besides the fact that their academic utility at the level of Masters and PhD courses can be hardly assessed.

In fact, the purposes underlying the adoption of positive discrimination in admission processes for undergraduate and postgraduate courses seem to a large extent different. Regardless of the fact that in both situations those measures tend to raise diversity in educational environment, they are mainly used at the undergraduate level as a tool to combat access inequality to higher education programs. They struggle negative effects from previous social discrimination – as usually affirmed in Brazil (Munanga, 2003, p. 119), in India⁶ and in the USA (Caruso, 2003, p. 332). Differently, at the level of the three postgraduate courses here observed, the anti-discriminatory purpose of affirmative actions does not constitute their major justification. However, it does not impede that admission processes for Master and PhD courses or even of future professors take equality as a relevant criteria for the final selection.⁷

³ In 2005, 30% of the total number of vacancies for new PhD and Masters Courses in the field of Human Rights created by the USP Faculty of Law were directed to candidates pertaining to “vulnerable groups”, i.e., American-Indians, black, disabled individuals and those facing socioeconomic difficulties. In a way to converge the affirmative actions with the principle that determines minimum quality standards in higher education, provisioned by article 206, VII, of the Federal Constitution of 1998, all candidates, including those from vulnerable groups, must apply for specific exams to prove their knowledge on legal issues as a prerequisite to enter the Course.

⁴ The definition of socioeconomic marginalization varies according to temporal and spatial factors. In the USA, the concept was treated, among others, by CUNNINGHAM, LOURY e SKRENTNY (2002, p. 846).

⁵ The UFPB reserved almost 40% percent of its vacancies (12) to black and American-Indian candidates. The UFPA offered five from its eighteen vacancies for people stemming from vulnerable groups, namely, two for black candidates, two for disabled candidates and one for American-Indians. Both universities demand that all candidates must be approved in the preliminary exams of admission, what demonstrates that no exception to meritocracy was accepted.

⁶ The principal objective of the Mandal Commission, established in 1979, was to define socially, economically and educationally backward groups in the Indian society.

⁷ In Sweden, for example, according to article 15a of Chapter 4 of Swedish Regulation on Universities (1993:100), positive discrimination may be used by higher educational institutions in cases where it is intended to promote equality in the workplace, in the filling of certain posts. A candidate belonging to an under-represented gender and possessing sufficient qualifications for the post may be chosen in preference to a candidate belonging to the opposite sex who would otherwise have been chosen, provided that the

A compensatory or anti-discriminatory motivation does not seem adequate to justify the actions introduced by USP, UFPA and UFPB, once it would disregard objectives and tasks assigned to postgraduate courses by rules of the Brazilian educational and legal system. The Federal Constitution of 1988 determines that it is up to the basic levels of education, not to the highest, to provide the fundamental notions and conditions for the upbringing of citizens. Despite historical problems, in Brazil, there would be no legal possibility to utilize postgraduate courses in execution of corrective, compensatory public policies in the field of education, not even implicitly, when the lower levels demonstrate innumerable deficiencies, avoiding members of marginalized groups to reach higher levels of education.

Consequently, it must be analyzed if there would be a reasonable justification for the implementation of affirmative actions at the postgraduate level.

Far from what has happened in Brazilian graduate courses, positive discrimination in postgraduate courses devoted to Human Rights is driven by the desire to construct references centers in this scientific field, located in the Law Schools of the USP, UFPB and UFPA.⁸ In order to stimulate awareness and deeper debates on Brazilian social problems and challenges, it has been necessary to foster a plural academic environment, comprising professors from different areas and, mainly, students-researchers coming from the most different social and ethnical groups, each one bringing their own personal, academic, scientific and cultural experiences.

By stimulating diversity in the research environment (classrooms, libraries and other spaces of discussion and interaction), it was attempted to reproduce the plurality that characterizes the territory and remarkably the nation within an educational institution. Through the construction of such a plural academic environment, where students-researchers are confronted to a wide variety of experiences and thoughts (in comparison to other courses), academic work and its results would be possibly affected, in a way that it could collaborate to a deeper and more effective comprehension, critic and modification of society, as well as to the conception of new mechanisms of social inclusion.

Diversity and its benefits in the field of research

One could ask if there is in effect a relation between human diversity and scientific results or, in the present case, what are clearly the benefits of human diversity for

difference in their respective qualifications is not so great. Such rule was however deemed to be incompatible with the European Law. See the Abrahamson case (C-407/98), judged by the European Court of Justice.

⁸ That was the position of the coordinators of the postgraduate courses in Human Rights of the above mentioned universities, according to discussions occurred in 2004 and 2005.

the achievement of the goals established in the postgraduate programs related to Human Rights.

Specifically in this field of research, there seems to be two clear positive effects caused by the stimulation of academic diversity. They will be called here: *individual or internal effect* and *collective or external effect*. The first presupposes that there is a relation between the personal experience of a certain researcher and his research, while the second is based on the assumption that human diversity may influence research of a certain group of researchers in the same working environment.

It is here assumed that every research in the field of Human Rights, as in other fields, is deeply influenced by personal factors. In other words, scientific results would be theoretically objective, but the processes that precede them are in great part subjective. Authors themselves, like Zippelius (2003, p. 5-6), recognize that there is a natural partiality permeating the development of every scientific study. The choice of scientific questions depends greatly on the interests of the researcher. Such interests define also the theme, the grounds and the chosen methods. They guide much of the scientific reflection that is supported on experiments, statistics and other data as well. All these phases and steps depend in great part on the researcher and are connected often implicitly to his or her social, economic, political situation and, mainly, to his or her cultural and personal experience.

Milton Santos (2004, p. 12), one of the most prominent geographers of the twentieth century, corroborated such statement by affirming that he took great advantages of his life and experiences in Latin America and Africa and of his contact to people in the Third World countries when developed one of his most important geographic studies, namely, the theory of the two circuits of urban economy, exclusively written for the situation of underdeveloped countries characterized by a deep socioeconomic and urban contrast.

In this spirit, the admission of candidates who have directly experienced situations with respect to social exclusion or to the implementation of Human Rights may change the way that this professional will deal with its topic and, probably, will lead her to apply her personal knowledge to develop a concrete research.⁹ It means that the social familiarity with the topic that constitutes the object of a specific research work by directing the development of the thesis, as well as a source of information. According to this viewpoint, for example, a researcher working on a theme about employment of disabled people would be deeply influenced in a positive way if he or she were disabled.

⁹ Such effects are still to be verified in the USP, UFPA and UFPB, what depends on the presentation of the final thesis by the students involved in the Master and PhD programs.

For educational institutions dealing with Human Rights, it is therefore clearly more advantageous to select candidates that, besides their intellectual capacity, experience and willingness to research, possess a number of personal attributes that may help her produce research of greater social impacts or, in other words, more connected to the elaboration of solutions for social problems.

On the other hand, to accept the collective effects of diversity in educational institutions, it must be first recognized that not only in-class, but also out-of-class learning are essential for the development of education (Flagg, 2004, p. 834) and research (Blau, 1973, p. 145). Under a collective point of view, the presence of the abovementioned disabled student-researcher in a classroom or in a study group may alter the perception of his or her colleagues with respect to the social reality where they are inserted. The group of students included in this environment will certainly face new experiences to which they would have no contact in the case of a more homogenous educational context. They may inquire, for instance, how do their disabled colleagues reach the classroom when there is no proper conditions for them in the building or how do their blind colleagues manage to access scientific information if there is no library for blind students.

Once the same students are devoted to studies related to social sciences, namely Human Rights and social inclusion, they will profit directly from their in and out-of-class stimuli. New questions and subsequent reflections caused by diversity will probably contribute to the creation of new arguments, points of view and probably will generate scientific results of a wider “social impact”.¹⁰

In a sum, the more diverse the cultural and social background of those individuals is, the deeper will be their direct or implicit contribution for the understanding of topics related to human rights and social inclusion by the academic community. As a consequence, the research developed in the field of social sciences would absorb a broader view of the reality analyzed, what should result in wider and better scientific outcomes.

One could ask if such individual and collective effects deriving from the creation of diversity in research centers would also be verified in all fields of research. In other words, one may also inquiry if diversity may produce the same results in different areas.

In Brazil, such question is still to be answered as soon as there are sufficient data about the effects of positive actions and diversity in areas related to Human Rights.

¹⁰ Research of social impact or responsive research is that linked to the production of solutions to social problems. The World Declaration on Higher Education, adopted in Paris in occasion of the World Conference on Higher Education, organized by UNESCO (hereinafter Paris Declaration), has recognized the idea of responsive research where it affirms that Higher Education Institutions should contribute to the development of society and improvement of society as a whole, especially by cooperating for the elimination of poverty, intolerance, violence, illiteracy, hunger, environmental degradation and disease, and for the development of peace.

Even so, it is possible to affirm that the importance of diversity may vary according to the relation between the field of research and the importance of the personal experience of the researchers for the development of their projects. However, it must be verified if such relation is stronger in social sciences in comparison to other areas and, finally, if the application of affirmative actions in each area is reasonable (necessary, adequate and proportionate) to the results that are expected.

Affirmative actions, diversity and development?

It is worth mentioning that one of the most interesting discussions concerning the experience of USP, UFPA and UFPB is not related to the benefits of diversity for science or technology themselves, but to the potential consequences of affirmative actions for the social development of pluralistic societies. Actually, it brings to debate the following question: how can affirmative actions and diversity collaborate to social development?

Under a wider perspective, it is possible to affirm that the introduction of affirmative actions at the level of postgraduate programs could contribute to: 1) social inclusion; 2) the formation of leaders and citizens; 3) the direct and indirect modification of institutions; and 4) to the production of responsive research. The first effect is solely related to the modification of admission processes, while the three other depends not only on the admission processes, but mainly on the creation of diversity within a certain institution.

Affirmative actions and social inclusion

The use of affirmative actions may be used as a direct mechanism against social exclusion, even though it is quite controversial if these benefits are compatible with the principle of equality under a traditional conception. Affirmative actions are generally defended under a popular discourse (Flagg, 2004, p. 828) as a method to correct social distortions caused by past discrimination, giving access to certain marginalized groups to places and spaces occupied by the traditional elite. The main point here is social inclusion, equality between all groups that constitute a certain society, regardless of the benefits that may be generated by diversity.

Based on such argument, affirmative actions have been generally applied in the admission processes for graduate courses. Notwithstanding, authors like Carvalho (2003, p. 163) propose the application of such actions in admission processes for postgraduate students, as implemented in Brazil, and even for professors, as already experienced in Sweden (aiming at gender equality).

The main reason for the use of affirmative actions in this sense is the under-representation of some marginalized groups in the academic environment. In Brazil, it

might be applied to combat the under-representation of black people in universities, once just one per cent of all university professors are black, even though 45% of the whole population is part of this ethnic group. At the USP Law School, for example, there are one blind and two black among approximately 140 professors, what exemplifies under-representation in the academic field.

The impact of affirmative actions for social inclusion in higher education may be verified by measuring the effect of the non-application of such methods on the number of students representing minorities and marginalized groups currently enrolled in Universities. In the USA, for example, as shown by ESPENSHADE and CHUNG (2005, p. 303), data for the 1997 entering class demonstrate that the abolishment of affirmative action “would reduce acceptance rates for African-American and Hispanic applicants by as much as one-half to two-thirds and have an equivalent impact on the proportion of underrepresented minority students in the admitted class”. Even if restricted to the reality of some universities in the USA, such data show that access of minorities and members of marginalized groups would be appreciably reduced if no action were applied.¹¹ It consequently corroborates the idea that affirmative actions are effective methods for social inclusion.

It is also noteworthy that the increase in the representation of these groups occurs not only when quotas are applied, but also in the case of soft measures – admission methods that do not ignore meritocracy, as those applied by USP, UFPB and UFPA or in Sweden. For instance, in the case of the postgraduate course on Human Rights created in the USP Faculty of Law, just the fact that affirmative actions would be applied attracted an incredible number of candidates belonging to marginalized groups. In fact, it was quite clear for those who experienced the admission process that many candidates were simply attracted by the news that positive discrimination in benefit of social inclusion would be adopted.

Affirmative actions and diversity

In addition to social inclusion, positive discrimination in educational institutions may generate diversity and, by doing so, collaborate to the formation of new leaders and citizens, to the modification of institutions and to the production of responsive research. Also in such hypotheses, affirmative actions contribute to social development.

¹¹ The use of affirmative actions for admission processes in undergraduate courses in Brazil is still recent. In reality, the first experience was taken by the State University of Bahia (UNEB) in 2003, followed by the universities in Rio de Janeiro and in Brasília. Therefore, there are not still many studies on the influence of such actions in the representation of certain minorities in universities. Interesting data with respect to the participation of black students in some Brazilian public universities are presented by GUIMARÃES (2003, p. 204).

Diversity, citizenship and leadership

If, according to some specialists, one of the most important functions of an educational institution consists of the preparation of students to work proactively in their social and political context,¹² influencing positively their environment and exercising responsibilities (Blau, 1973, p. 156) or, in other words, the expansion of leadership and citizenship, then the creation of diversity in educational institutions would be essential for social development – understood in the terms established by the Copenhagen Declaration.¹³

Affirmative actions and diversity may be seen as tools for the education of new leaders and citizens, because they create the basic conditions for the revision of discrimination and influence informal education (Flagg, 2004, p. 836).

In educational institutions, out-of-class or informal education as well as debates on new conflicts resulted from diversity among students have recently been seen as a way to train new leaders and citizens. As recognized by the North-American Supreme Court in the case *Grutter vs. Bollinger*, sentenced in April 2003,¹⁴ diversity of the student body may produce critical-mass and promote learning benefits for the whole group of students, preparing them better as professionals and citizens (Post, 2005, p. 26-27).

Above and beyond that, the formation of such citizens, prepared to live, to work and to think about solutions for social problems in multicultural, global and pluralistic community tends to raise advantages for the institutions where they work in. In addition, they would also benefit the whole nation, mainly because these professionals will act as social, political and economic leaders, aware of social diversity. Their experience in scholar banks would certainly influence decision-making processes in which they take part, conferring them the basic comprehension about the complexities of the societies where they live and act.

¹² Also according to article 9, b, of the Paris Declaration, “Higher education institutions should educate students to become well informed and deeply motivated citizens, who can think critically, analyze problems of society, look for solutions to the problems of society, apply them and accept social responsibilities”.

¹³ Social development depends on a broad-based involvement of individuals in the formulation of solutions for the problems concerning their societies. Thus, citizenship and leadership are deemed to be fundamental for a development process that aims at improving, for all social groups, their well-being standards.

¹⁴ A candidate rejected by the University of Michigan Law School, Barbara Grutter, filed suit in 1997, alleging that the University benefited, on the basis of race, candidates that were members of underrepresented minorities, like Hispanics and African Americans, what would be incompatible with the principle of equal treatment. The case was judged by the Supreme Court, which held that the United States Constitution “does not prohibit the law school narrowly tailored use of race in admissions decisions to further a compelling interest in obtaining the educational benefits that flow from a diverse student body”.

Diversity and the modification of institutions

Affirmative actions are also broadly accepted as an instrument to break or to reduce stereotypes and discrimination in many types of institutions. Such statement presupposes that cultural and human factors are fundamental for the construction of such social structures (Frader, 1998, p. 13). In fact, not only educational institutions, but also enterprises, as well as political and administrative organs may have their activities significantly influenced by human diversity.

It has been already demonstrated that, in private organizations, the increase in the number of blacks and women in workplaces could reduce discrimination against these two categories, once the higher presence of such underrepresented minorities would provoke a modification or disconfirmation of many stereotypes that exist among a prevailing white masculine workforce (Yenolsky, 2003, p. 1394).

In the political arena, it has already been affirmed that the transformative character of democratic participatory structures would directly depend on the equal and active participation of all kinds of citizens and mainly of marginalized groups. According to it, the success of participatory models adopted by public administration in democratic states would not achieve their goals without mechanisms that assure the real participation of marginalized groups in decision-makings processes.¹⁵ So, if the State does not guarantee the duly representation of the social pluralism along such processes, participatory mechanisms adopted would probably be dominated by the traditional elites, perpetuating problems related to “pluralism-blindness” and giving participative methods a simple formal character.

Finally, in educational institutions, the effects of diversity are not limited to the group of students. Diversity influences also other members of those institutions. Professors and employees will be forced to discuss topics concerning the exercise of Human Rights and social inclusion due to the presence of minorities and marginalized groups within their institution. They will also face social, cultural, educational and legal challenges and problems due to a more plural educational environment. A simple example of such effect may be verified on the discussion of the Commission for the creation of the postgraduate course in the area of Human Rights at USP, when professors faced, for the first time, questions respecting the execution of simple academic activities (as the application of exams, presentation of seminars etc.) by students with disabilities.

¹⁵ According to HICKEY and MOHAN (2005, p. 243), “certain cases of democratic decentralization stand out as having achieved both greater participation of and social justice for marginal groups and localities, as with the Indian states of West Bengal and Kerala. In both cases, decentralization has been credited with ensuring the participation of subordinate groups – such as women, landless groups, sharecroppers and small peasants – and being directly linked to the pursuit of redistributive policies that have had pro-poor outcomes”.

In all those cases, the most important effect obtained by the implementation of positive discrimination in order to increase diversity resides on the modification of the institution itself. Diversity creates new challenges and problems that stimulate the review of some institutional patterns, behaviors and rules. Hence, it ends up promoting a broad Human Rights education, understood as the creation and expansion of a culture of respect to human dignity (Benevides, 2003, p. 309) and diversity. That seems to be the first step for the recognition and respect of Human rights in pluralistic societies, since it is capable to destroy the blindness that impedes, for instance, the correct application of the equality principle, the fair distribution of resources according to a distributive view of justice and the legitimate establishment of public policies.

Specifically through the implementation of diversity in educational institutions, affirmative actions may change different kinds of institutions directly or indirectly. An indirect modification will result from the action of their alumni as critical and conscious citizens and leaders in those institutions where they work in (economic, social, religious and political arenas). Besides that, diversity would provoke immediate changes within those educational institutions where it takes places (educational arena).

Diversity and responsive research

Finally, as already pointed out, internal and external effects of diversity in the field of research also show a certain link to social development since research may be used as tool for the resolution of social problems, like poverty, intolerance, violence, illiteracy, hunger and so on. In other words, it means that, through diversity and the proper representation of marginalized groups in certain areas of research, as those created by USP, UFPA and UFPB, it will be possible to stimulate a kind of responsive research, or research of social impact. Due to the link between the personal experiences of the researchers and the topics on which they are working, research centers will be automatically conducted to the production of solutions for social problems.

As a further consequence, the representation of social pluralism in the institutions where solutions for the reality are debated, elaborated, improved and developed will probably increase the legitimacy of educational institutions, mainly of those financed with public resources and which are expected to answer effectively to social demands.

Affirmative actions and social development

For all these reasons, the broad employment of affirmative actions in educational institutions (including the field of research) must be discussed under the idea of social development, as enshrined in the Copenhagen Declaration.

The evidences pointed out are not free from controversies, but are already enough to demonstrate some other benefits either deriving directly from positive discrimination in admission processes for the admission of students or from the diversity itself in educational environments. Basically, they reveal that affirmative actions and diversity must be more seriously taken not only as mechanisms against social exclusion, but also as powerful instruments against the correction of marginalization and “pluralism-blindness”.

Conclusions

This paper intended to illustrate that affirmative actions or positive discrimination in the higher levels of education and research may be employed under a new perspective, beyond that regarding social reparation for past racial marginalization in certain societies.

In reality, the implementation of new admission criteria at the highest level of education (masters and PhD programs) based not only on the evaluation of the candidate’s capacity and vocation for research, but furthermore on their racial, social and physical conditions may be adopted in order to foster the construction of pluralistic working environments, creating human diversity in the research production arena. As a consequence, it may give rise to individual and collective effects.

Moreover, the case of USP, UFPA and UFPB demonstrates that affirmative actions in educational institutions are likely to produce other important effects. They may be employed as tools to promote diversity. In this sense, they are capable, first, to provoke the *transformation of educational institutions*, spreading a culture of respect to Human Rights, and, second, to cooperate to the *formation of new citizens and leaders*, able to work and act more effectively in pluralistic societies simply because they are aware of social complexities. Diversity may still generate stimuli for the discussion and development of new scientific solutions for social problems. In other words, it stimulates the *production of responsive research*, although it is questionable if such effect takes place in every area besides those of social sciences.

For all those reasons, the broader use of positive discrimination (or affirmative action) must be subject to new discussions and considerations. It is essential to verify to which extent they can be considered an effective tool for social development in pluralistic societies, where marginalization clearly affects the exercise of Human Rights by some vulnerable social groups, like those including people with disabilities and blacks.

If the hypothesis that affirmative actions and diversity are really efficient instruments against such social problems, it will be then necessary to review some conceptions embodied in international documents, namely the Paris Convention on Higher

Education for the XXI Century, from 1998, and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, from 1946.

According to them, access of any individual to the higher levels of education must be solely based on the merit of the candidates,¹⁶ without considerations to the effects of discrimination (soft or hard positive actions) for the creation of diversity and its benefits for the formation of citizens, professionals and leaders.

By suggesting an avoidance of discrimination (except for purposes of gender equality, art. 4), such international declarations make it unnecessarily harder for the educational institutions to achieve the goals which they were assigned, principally the role of educating individuals so that they can analyze critically their societies, changing them when necessary to achieve social development.

Without international recognition of the advantages offered by such tools in some complex societies, the international community and some States will probably lose an essential instrument for the combat of marginalization in the long-term, so perpetuating social exclusion and, what is worse, the blindness towards social pluralism that affects, in some countries, a huge number of institutions.

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¹⁶ Pursuant to article 3, a, of the Paris Declaration, in accordance with article 26, 1, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, “admission to higher education should be based on the merit, capacity, efforts, perseverance and devotion, showed by those seeking access to it, and can take place in a lifelong scheme, at any time, with due recognition of previously acquired skills. As a consequence, no discrimination can be accepted in granting access to higher education on grounds of race, gender, language or religion, or economic, cultural or social distinctions, or physical disabilities”.

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