

Studying human rights from a transversal and transnational perspective

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A. International Seminar on Human Mobility and Human Rights

Coordinators: Hajime Nishitani (Hiroshima University) and Víctor Merino (URV)

The International Seminar on Human Rights and Human Mobility began after collaboration with Professor Nishitani when he participated in the International Student Seminar, which is held every year at Hiroshima University. Under the umbrella of the International Network of Universities, of which the URV is a member, a seminar on Global Citizenship and Peace was held in which URV students and lecturers participated. It was at one of these seminars that, as a way to consolidate the network, a decision was made to hold a seminar at the URV to deal specifically with topics related to human rights, with special emphasis on the problem of human mobility. The first edition of this seminar was held in March 2013. The seminar, coordinated by professors Nishitani and Merino, involved the participation of over eight lecturers from various departments of the URV. It has been held every year since then.



Nombre de la entidad solicitante : Universidad Rovira i Virgili
Nombre y apellidos de la persona representante : Victor Merino

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Certificado de reconocimiento como proyecto para la celebración de los 400 Años de Relaciones entre Japón y España (El Año de Japón en España)

Por la presente, le agradecemos la presentación de su solicitud de proyecto para los 400 Años de Relaciones entre Japón y España (El Año de Japón en España).

Una vez que se ha examinado su solicitud "Seminario Internacional sobre Movilidad Humana y Derechos Humanos" presentada con fecha del 5 de 2 de 2014, tenemos el gusto de certificar su proyecto como actividad oficial para la celebración de los 400 Años de Relaciones entre Japón y España (El Año de Japón en España).

Student profile

The profiles of the students who have participated in the four editions of the seminar are varied. The participating students from Hiroshima University are from several degrees and disciplines: law, economics, engineering, social sciences, human sciences, etc. There was a change in the profiles of URV students who participated in the last edition.

The call for participation in the seminar was open to all students of the URV's Faculty of Legal Sciences. However, the students who applied to participate in the first three years were all taking the degree in Law. Last year, because I incorporated the project into the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) programme of the University of Monterrey for the course in Labour Law of the degree in Social Work, I was able to also involve students from that degree. I believe this helps to embed the seminar into the Faculty of Legal Sciences and enables collaborative work with students of different profiles not only from Hiroshima University but also from the URV. In total, 31 students from Hiroshima University and 32 students from the URV have participated in the various editions of the seminar.

Content and teaching staff

The topics discussed in this seminar are related to human rights in general and human mobility in particular. Although the seminars were organised in collaboration with Dr Nishitani, the lecturers who taught the classes at all four editions were from various departments of the URV and had different profiles. This interdisciplinary nature of the seminar is one of its distinctive elements. It has enabled human rights to be studied from various perspectives and therefore to attract the maximum number of students.

Some of the topics discussed at the various editions of the seminar are:

- ♦ Citizenship and territory
- ♦ Asylum and migration in the European Union
- ♦ European Union and freedom of movement
- ♦ Social rights and the crisis of the Welfare State
- ♦ Sociological perspectives of migration
- ♦ Criminal punishment and human rights
- ♦ Environmentally displaced people
- ♦ Gender and the United Nations
- ♦ Religious pluralism and human rights
- ♦ Public policies and racism
- ♦ Environmental law and human rights
- ♦ Indigenous rights and environmental protection
- ♦ International litigation and the environment
- ♦ Freedom of movement and residence, and inverse discrimination

Many of these sessions have been maintained for all editions, especially those related to forced displacement and human mobility, which are essential elements of the seminar.

The teachers who have participated in the various editions are: Antonio Cardesa, Jordi Jaria, Aitana de la Varga, Susana Borràs, Albert Noguera, Juan Ramón Fallada, Adrià Calvet, Raquel Vañó, Núria Torres, Beatriz Felipe, Thays Recarte, Malka San Lucas, Lorena Martínez and Màriam Lufti, from the Department of Public Law of the Faculty of Legal Sciences; Diana Marín, from the Department of Private, Financial and Procedural Law of the Faculty of Legal Sciences; and David Dueñas, from the Department of Business Management of the Faculty of Economics. Participating lecturers from Hiroshima University are Hajime Nishitani and Emiko Nakasaka.

From the first edition of the seminar, we believed it would be a good idea to include an introductory session in which the students of each university could introduce themselves in their own language and teach the students from the other university to do the same in theirs. This was because we wanted to transmit the fact that we would be working in an intercultural context in which the *lingua franca*, in this

case English, was not the mother tongue of any of the participants. Using English as the *lingua franca* could have been a motive for rejection for students who are not used to learning content in that way. However, it was pointed out right from the start that this should be seen by the participants as an opportunity for them to develop their language skills. In the end, positive evaluations from our students led some of them to ask about the possibility of taking subjects in English as well as specialised courses in human rights at other universities.

The seminars included a cultural programme that gave the students the opportunity to share time and space together outside the classroom. This was useful for teaching the Japanese students the language, traditions and culture of Tarragona and Catalonia. Activities included guided tours around the city, a visit to see *Castells* practice sessions, and a *calçotada* at the end of the Seminar. From the third edition onwards, we incorporated a final session in which the students were asked to evaluate the methodologies, session contents, and activities, etc. of the seminar. This helped the coordinator and teaching staff to bear in mind the students' opinions and expectations for the next seminar, if possible.

In the last edition we added a methodology that was well received by the students. Similar to the methodology employed every August at the INU seminar in Hiroshima, we organised a role-play exercise in which students were divided into groups to simulate a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly to pass a resolution related to the main topic of the seminar. Students were asked to work in groups on a subject of their choice and to present it at the final session. The other students were allowed to give their opinions on the chosen topic using the contents they had worked on in the previous sessions.

A collaborative project by the students of the URV and Hiroshima University

To involve all group members in preparation for the work and in the presentation, we decided to form pairs of students. Each pair was made up of one student from the Universitat Rovira i Virgili and one from Hiroshima University. To encourage equal participation, the students were asked to follow the following methodology:

1. Choose a human right: the students had to choose one of the rights included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a real problem by which someone feels affected. Since the profiles of the students were not necessarily from the legal sciences, this would oblige them to understand a real situation and how this situation affects the right they have chosen. Moreover, as the students had to justify their choice, they had to make a sociological analysis in order to understand human rights not only from the theoretical perspective, which was already being discussed at each session, but more from the perspective of social reality.

2. Make a comparative analysis of their chosen problem in Japan and Spain: to involve the students and aid their understanding of human rights, they were asked to ascertain and analyse the situation in their own country with regard to this problem. Each student was able to access information about their own country and were given international documentation (reports in English by international NGOs). With their partner they then had to discuss what the situation was like in their own country and compare the two.

3. Reflect on the current state of the topic and the effective protection of human rights: finally, each partner had to consider how human rights are tools for guaranteeing the autonomy, freedom and equality of human beings and how they need to have guarantees in each legal code. Since the code for each case was different, they also understood that law and rights reflect the values, principles and conceptions shared by each society.

The result was an interactive session in which all students spoke and entered a group debate on situations that affect both Japanese and Spanish society, though their legal responses may be (and are) very different.

I do not intend to replicate this format, though it could be a good starting point for deciding how students – in this case from three different universities and with a considerable time difference – can work together. I believe it could be a good idea to suggest that students discuss a similar simulation but not by country (though maybe it could be interesting to see Japanese students representing Mexico or Spain, and Mexican or Spanish students representing Japan) but by representatives from NGOs, states and international agencies. The sessions could be held in the morning and in the afternoon so that the time difference would not be a problem and the students could work together.



B. COIL UDEM – URV

Coordinators: Victoria Méndez (UDEM) and Mario Ruiz, Ángeles Galiana, Juan Ramón Fallada and Víctor Merino (URV))

Unlike the previous project, on the COIL project (Collaborative Online International Learning) *Studying Human Rights from a transversal and transnational perspective*, between the Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM) and the URV, an evaluative, curricular activity was completed in the seminars of the course in Labour Law of the degree in Social Work. For this project URV students formed groups of three that worked together with groups of two on the International Topics course taught at Monterrey University by Victoria Méndez of the department of Social Sciences. Both modules began during the second semester of the academic year, which aided the development of the project. Participating in the project were Mario Ruiz, Ángeles Galiana and Juan Ramón Fallada, lecturers in the Philosophy of Law from the department of Public Law, who adapted the sessions and content of their lectures to

the needs of the seminars in which this methodology was applied. In total, 12 groups (38 URV students and 30 UDEM students) took part in the project.

Methodology

For this activity the students had to create a project that applied the law to an everyday case or social reality so that they could reflect on how rights can be instruments for social change. The procedure for this form of cooperation between the students of the two universities was as follows:

1. Choose a topic, question or current social problem on social rights or equality. This could relate to legal matters, inequality situations, challenges, level of recognition, guarantees, creation of good practices, recommendations or analyses of the extent of effective compliance with social rights. URV students had to focus their analysis on Tarragona, Catalonia or Spain, while UDEM students had to focus on Monterrey, the state of Nuevo León or Mexico. All students had to identify a problem that affects an everyday reality and involves a violation of equality or a specific social right.

2. Use Street Law methodology, i.e. take the law to the street. To do so, they had to detect or identify the problem as indicated in the previous section, evaluate why this problem violates social or human rights, and evaluate the problem by involving agents that may intervene or be affected by it. The aim was to evaluate a social reality from the rights perspective in order to find real and feasible solutions based on discourse and social rights.

3. Compare and critically evaluate the current state of their chosen topic in each of the countries or cities they had chosen in accordance with the previous instructions and the project's guidelines (on data, hypothesis, methodology and conclusions) and to present their findings to the rest of the class.

The presentations by each group had to include the comparative study and the following points:

- Reasons for choosing the problem.
- Methodology used to carry out the project.
- A detailed explanation of the research undertaken and especially of the reaction of the social agents, people or group members who were interviewed or consulted or who participated in the project.
- Conclusions reached and suggestions for improving the social situation analysed.

To carry out this project, the lecturers organised the activities, published a schedule on Facebook (we know students are frequent users of this medium), created a private group and invited the students to join it.



We agreed that they could choose their preferred form of tele-collaboration and asked for samples of work from each member of the group. Our aim was to regulate the work procedure. As members of the teaching staff, we were also aware that we had to coordinate and participate so that we could intervene whenever a group did not function properly or had difficulties and solve any “problems” that arose before they led to students rejecting or abandoning the project.

The students who took part in this activity were evaluated in accordance with the same guidelines and methods as those for the other students on the Social Rights course. However, to ensure recognition of their effort and the uniqueness of the activity, we extended the items to be evaluated on the presentation to 14. This enabled us to weight grades in accordance with the project’s special characteristics. We also asked the Vice-rector for Internationalization to issue a certificate to demonstrate the students’ participation on the project.

According to the students’ assessments of this activity, the results were positive. Despite the problems experienced by some groups, especially those caused by the different type of subject taught at the two universities, evaluations were positive for an activity in which the realities have been shown to be different (e.g. the International Seminar with Hiroshima University). I also think it is important to point out that on both projects students gained awareness of the force and relevance of human rights discourse, that they learned that rights need to have guarantees in order to make them effective, and that intercultural contexts make it easier to understand the social realities to which human rights are responses.

Testimonial

My first contact with Hiroshima University was at the third International Seminar on Human Rights held at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili (URV) in March 2015. The Seminar was an extremely enriching experience at which I learned new things about Human Rights. The cultural activities helped to foster closer relations with the Japanese students, which encouraged me to apply for funding to attend the INU student seminar in Hiroshima in August 2015. It was very pleasing to see them all again and to meet people from all over the world with the same interests as mine. It was the first time I'd spoken English for 24 hours non-stop, which helped me to gain more confidence.



As I really enjoyed attending these two seminars and I learned so much, I asked to also attend the URV's fourth International Seminar on Human Rights. I was pleasantly surprised to meet up again with two students I had got to know when we prepared a role play at the INU seminar in Hiroshima.

I strongly recommend anyone interested in international affairs and who likes meeting new people to take part in the international seminars organized by the INU.

MERITXELL SALVAT (on the left in the photograph)
URV law student

I am very fortunate to have had the opportunity to take part in the Seminar on Human Rights. At the URV we enjoyed many interesting presentations. The one I particularly liked was Human Mobility and Citizenship across the EU because it's a subject I'd never studied before. We visited Montserrat, Barcelona and Reus, tasted traditional tapas and drank some wine. We learned about history and culture in the museums and also by speaking to students of the URV. My marvellous experience in Spain is unforgettable.

LI HUA
University of Hiroshima, Japan

What impressed me most about the URV were its students. Thanks to an international seminar, not only did I learn the concept of human rights in Europe but I also made lots of friends. Everyone was so nice to me. We went to bars and discos and around the city. Tarragona is the perfect place to study and have a great time with very friendly people.



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