

REDUCING INEQUALITIES: WORK PROPOSALS

The proposal is intended for students in the 4th year of compulsory secondary education, baccalaureate secondary education, vocational education, and university studies.

Classroom work proposals

1. Introduction

The conversation “Reducing inequalities, ending poverty, zero hunger, and health and wellbeing” was held during the **7th edition of Cosmògraf 2023**¹ (<https://web.manresa.cat/ciutatagora/menu/15049-videos/158>), falling within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 2, 3, and 10) for the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development 2030 Agenda. The event took place on Friday, 10 November 2023, between Begoña Román, philosophy professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Barcelona (UB), and Albert Sales, political scientist, sociologist, and associate professor at the Department of Political Science with Pompeu Fabra University (UPF), and was moderated by Rosa de Paz Sanjuan, head of the Equality and Social Cohesion department within the City Council of Manresa.

Sanjuan began the conversation by asking what the word poverty means and how society acts with regard to poverty. This question encompassed the six introductory points presented by philosopher Begoña Román on how to combat poverty. Román asked how it is possible that in the 21st century there is still food poverty when we have a society that has “the technical capacity to prevent this from happening.” Therefore, “it is a matter of will” (1), according to the professor. However, when we discuss poverty, we are not only talking about food poverty, but also about nutritional poverty (such as childhood obesity), as well as the spirit, “nourishing ourselves through inclusion,” that is, relational poverty (2) as well according to Román. Society has provided a far too individualistic reading of poverty: we fall into a situation of poverty because we do not have enough knowledge, because we do not work, because we do not have a social network, or due to bad luck. In short, in the words of Román, when we address poverty, we’re discussing a structural (3), systemic fact where no one takes responsibility for it because it is not a personal issue. People don’t combat or attack the causes of poverty, which is why welfare practices are carried out “to assuage one’s conscience.” That is, “we assume the structural causes without thinking about deontological solidarity, out of duty” (4), which would force us to commit to making



Begoña Román



Albert Sales Campos

structural changes according to Román. As an example, the professor of philosophy pointed out the responsibility of voting, of consumption, and so on. In addition to that, we must add the lack of generating connections and hope (5) as well as regenerative justice (6) “to a very powerful state of social law where there is not enough effort to combat situations of inequality,” according to Román.

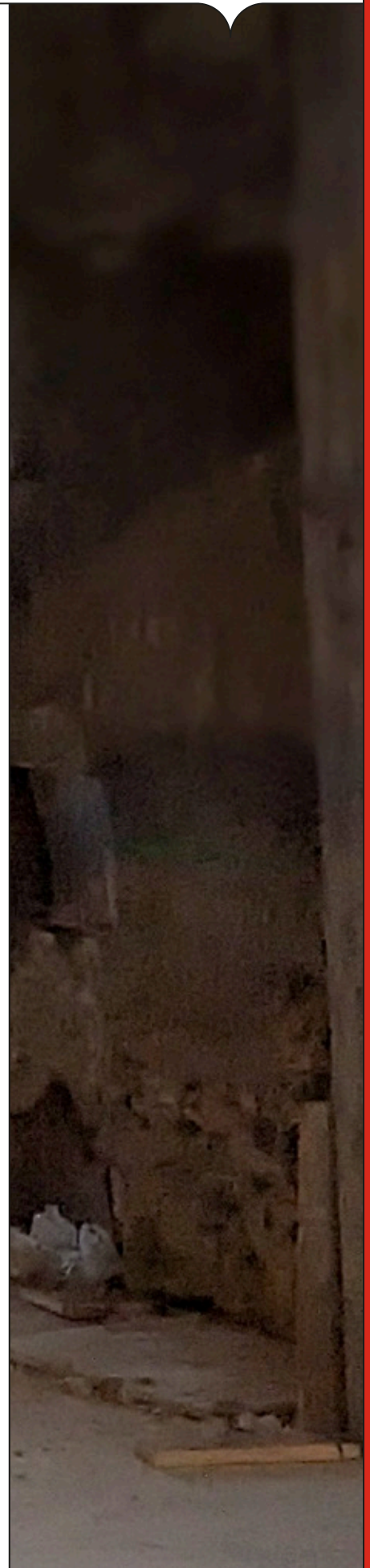
Albert Sales made his first statement by exposing what the systemic capitalist mortgage crisis of 2008 entailed, which produced a major social impact. In Catalonia, Spain, and Europe, the macroeconomic recovery indicators from that crisis date to 2011, but the rate of the population at risk of poverty and/or social exclusion has not yet recovered and is increasing. The political scientist stated that “it has been assumed that one-quarter of the population is in the social risk sector,” and although on the one hand it is good to be aware of it, in that the problem is identified, but on the other hand, it isn’t good since it has become normalized.

Another type of poverty began appearing during the 1970s and 1980s in the last century, a disqualifying one, “part of the population believes it is part of the middle class, yet does not have the capacity to sustain their lifestyle (owning a home, going on vacation, consuming leisure, etc.),” according to Sales. The political scientist quoted Serge Paugam to talk about the classification of forms of poverty in Western societies. At first, poverty was an integrated phenomenon (people who subsisted on little and it was a widespread situation). Then, the industrial pauperism of the early 20th century began decreasing due to redistributive policies, popular labour movements, the creation of certain social protection mechanisms, and increased wages (to broaden the users of the capitalist market). Consequently, poverty is no longer an integrated or normalized phenomenon, but a more extraordinary reality that leads to a relationship between poverty and marginality.

Sales addressed the point analysed by Roman on society’s individualistic reading of wellbeing with respect to poverty to explain how poverty is associated with marginalization. In other words, “when a welfare state is strong and protects a part of its population, those who stay on the sidelines are to blame and all the stereotypes fall on them,” stated the PhD in criminology. The marginalized are all those who do not follow the canons of normal society and are excluded from the services provided (social services, for example).

Therefore, the following types of poverty currently coexist: marginal, extreme (the homeless), plus the new and disqualifying poverty. For Sales, as for Roman, talking about poverty is easier than talking about inequalities since “talking about poverty means talking about what happens to others.”

And what is the government's response to the increase in poverty? To answer this question posed by Sales, the sociologist referred to the neoliberal management model based on three elements: 1) the delegation



→ ² Director of studies at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) research centre in France. Paugam, Serge (2007). *Las formas elementales de la pobreza*. Alianza.

of state responsibilities to private philanthropy (Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about this), 2) the movement from welfare to workfare (currently the main pillar of our lives is work), and 3) the criminalization of poverty.

“Poverty is the expression of inequalities,” in Sales’s words. One’s place of birth, nationality, and social class of origin, or luck, continue to have a strong impact, and redistributive policies (which are not greatly liked) need to be implemented such as the inheritance and gift tax as well as the increase in taxes with guaranteed basic income and with bolder policies in order to move towards a more egalitarian society.

For Sales, the answer to Sanjuan's question about whether citizens have progressed from the focus of the law is no, because “it has been delegated to institutions.” Román also thinks the answer is no as “there is no action being taken on the causes, even though social service professionals and legislators would like to combat inequalities.” For the philosophy researcher, it is very important to work on community links and not enough is being done on that matter.

One of Sanjuan’s last questions, and the final part of the dialogue between Roman and Sales, was whether there is aporophobia nowadays. According to Roman, the exact word today would not be so much aporophobia as distrust, or a distrust of others. Sales linked the issue of distrust with the fact of the competitiveness of one group in a situation limited by scarce resources which, consequently, leads to confrontation, an instrument generated from power in response to the loss of privileges (thereby encouraging fascist arguments).

The event concluded with some verses from the poem *Silent Wars*, by Eduardo Galeano, recited in Catalan by Rosa de Sanjuan. In the words of the moderator, the poem “calls for profound changes and in some way also includes contributions to this dialogue.”

Poverty doesn't explode like bombs, nor does it sound like gunshots.

We think we know everything about the poor: that they don't work, what they eat, how much they weigh, how big they are, what they have, what they think, how they vote, what they believe.

We only need to know why the poor are poor.

[...]

Background

What is the status of poverty and inequality in welfare societies? What are the causes and possible solutions to address the issue from a structural, social, cultural, and community point of view based on rights and not on charity?

2. Goals, objectives, and activities

Metes:

1. Introduce young people to analyses and reflections on social inequality and poverty
2. Create connections and community networks to combat social inequalities
3. Encourage groups of young people to be active leaders at the local level
4. Create research proposals that address social inequality
5. Involve the entire (educational) community in reflecting on the consequences of the welfare society

Objectives and activities⁴:

1. Understand the global causes of poverty as well as the local causes (goals 1, 2, and 3)

- Read the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs](https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda)⁵ thoroughly.
 - Overview of the 2030 Agenda and its goals.
 - What are the [SDGs](https://www.globalgoals.org)⁶?
 - Are they covered at your institution/educational centre/ university? What do they have to do with inequalities?⁷
- Create a booklet, an etymological guide, and resources regarding social inequalities based on concepts that have emerged in the dialogue:
 - What is pauperism?
 - What is aporophobia?
 - Neoliberal theories and the welfare society.
 - The capitalist model in the 21st century.
 - Types of poverty.
 - State solidarity assistance. Social services.
 - Private philanthropy.
 - Social inclusion/social exclusion.
 - Ethics applied to social intervention.
- Review Albert Sales's book , *El delito de ser pobre. Una gestión neoliberal de la marginalidad*⁸ and/or Begoña Román's book *Ética de los servicios sociales*⁹.
 - What is each author's position?



⁴ From the conference/dialogue.

⁵ <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

⁶ <https://www.globalgoals.org>

⁷ https://mediambient.gencat.cat/ca/05_ambits_dactuacio/educacio_i_sostenibilitat/desenvolupament_sostenible/agenda-2030-ods/que-son-els-ods/index.html

⁸ Sales, A. (2014). *El delito de ser pobre. Una gestión neoliberal de la marginalidad*. Icaria

⁹ Román, B. (2016). *Ética de los servicios sociales*. Herder editorial

- Evaluate the terms philanthropy and public aid/principles, virtues of social services, as well as citizen empowerment.
- Prepare a presentation using graphs, diagrams, illustrations, summaries, and so on about the results of the previous activities to exhibit them at the schools and to be able to make small educational discoveries.
- Do a literature review to situate the general and local context: causes and consequences.
 - What is poverty? What is social inequality?
 - What is social inclusion? Documentation.
 - What are the assistance tools?
 - Are there barriers in the welfare state model with regard to age, sex, gender, nationality, and so on?
 - What is the poverty data on Catalonia? What about the data on homelessness in Barcelona? Is there data for Manresa?
- Make global assessments of the general and local contexts: causes and consequences of inequality and the instruments that, for example, operate at the local level in Manresa.

2. Share and create networks among youth (Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5)

- Through a Google Sites page, develop a database of exhibitions, research works, activities, projects, experiments, and so on that address access to housing for young people, newly arrived residents, and the general population.
 - Establish which steps should be followed.
 - Sources to obtain information.
 - List of obstacles and aid.
 - Final assessments and conclusions.
- Organize a monthly space (section) on the radio/YouTube channel/ etc. to share and reflect on what an egalitarian society means (global and local points of view).
 - current state of affairs.
 - measures to be corrected and possible solutions.
 - give a voice to the voiceless.
- Use Google Sites, Padlet, or an infographic (Canva, Genially, Prezi, etc.) to compile analyses, reflections, and conclusions.



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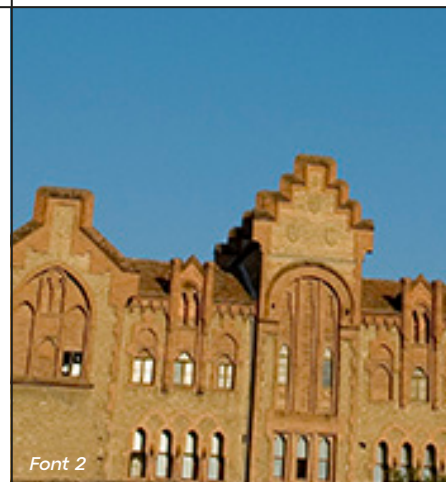
3. Proposals to expand future research work (Goals 1, 2, and 4)

- Analyse in depth what research work is and, specifically, research work on social inequalities, poverty, hunger, and egalitarian societies.

- Consider an issue related to SDGs 1, 2, 3, and 10 at a global and/or local level.
 - Make a work plan with hypotheses, objectives, and research lines that should be addressed.
 - Compile information. Access sources.
 - Write a research paper: parts and structure.
- Work with documentary sources:
 - What types of sources can be consulted?
- Help introduce young people to research:
 - Think, analyse, and learn about possible topics:
 - egalitarian society
 - social inequality
 - punitive social model
 - consumer society
 - social benefits: perception of users and society in general.
 - childhood poverty
 - food and nutritional poverty.
- Develop a possible research plan/research paper based on Serge Paugam's¹⁰ papers and books regarding the different types of poverty.

4. Conduct a more concrete study on the situation of social inequality in Manresa based on Sales's words (at the university level). (Goals 3 and 4)

- Analyse and contextualize the aid from the Santa Clara Convent Foundation with Sister Lucía Caram in charge.
 - Priority lines or objectives.
 - Perception of users and the local population.
- Analyse and contextualize the relationship between the rate of imprisonment/reintegration at the Lledoners prison due to theft with foreigners who suffer from systemic marginal poverty.



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5. Involve the entire (educational) community in reflecting on the causes and consequences of the welfare society model (Goal 5).

- Organize a series of meetings/talks/exchanges between young people on what they know about the causes and consequences of social inequalities:
 - Documented consultation of sources.
 - Do young people think it is a topic that merits discussion? Why or why not?
 - What is the situation in Catalonia? What is the situation at a more local and closer level?
 - Share results, reflections, and experiences.