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We-Uri 2.0: Identities and Transcultural Mediations in Korea-Spain Academic Exchanges

우리 2.0: 한국-스페인 학술 교류에서의 정체성과 다문화 매개

Abstract

This paper presents the on going joint research work done at the University of Malaga Korean Studies and Social Anthropology Areas that is analysing the social flows of university exchange students between Korea and Spain.

The research project and this paper is born from an idea of Korean culture in a broad sense, and in relation to the high degree of connections beyond the initial geographical space in which it was created. Thus, its objective is directed to understand the cultural connections that Korea, Korean people and Korean culture have been constructing with the Spanish-speaking world in relation to the emergence of a new sense of identity and place among young people. In other words, the research project aims to study the influence of that transnational influx of people and ideas is exercising over the identity of young people and its identity redefinition, what we could call an “Uri (우리) 2.0”.

The phenomenon of globalization has affected the Republic of Korea for a long time already, and the number of Koreans going abroad nowadays is enormous. In the same way, the number of foreigners going to Korea for shorter or longer period has been increasing consistently for several decades already. In this context, it is possible to claim that a new feeling of pride national confidence has emerged in Korea within the framework of a globalized Korea. This process has led to a redefinition of the ethnic identity as a response to intercultural contacts, multicultural diversity, the diaspora, immigration, etc.

Most of the studies about this topic have been developed from a general perspective for the whole of Korea, but it would be interesting to understand this process from a more micro-level point of view in a transnational setting. For that reason, the present paper aims to study the influence in the process of identity construction among the students involved in inter-university mobility programs between the University of Malaga and Korean Universities.

Key words: Identity, Academic Exchange, Transculturality, Diversity, Homogeneity

Introduction

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Objective of the Research

In order to understand and conceptualize this process of identity construction among the students involved in this programs of international mobility between the University of Malaga and Korean University we have the following specific objectives:

- To understand the expectations, the processes and the culmination of social relations of Korean and Spanish students within the frame of exchange programs between the University of Malaga and its partner universities in Korea
- To analyse how is constructed the university experience in each of the institutions involved in the mobility programs.
- To research about the production of social relations during the exchange program.

Methodology

We use a qualitative methodology directed to the analysis and interpretation of phenomena through the analysis of discourse, facts and their social meaning. In this regard, within qualitative methodology, the ethnographic method is the one that can

allow us to analyse the academic social flows in their social and cultural contexts of meaning.

The new understanding of community in Korea, We-Uri 2.0.

Since the second half of the twentieth century Korean society is undertaking profound social, cultural, political and economic changes. All these changes have marked deeply the way Korean society creates new groups, associations or communities where individuals relate and create ties among them.

Among all the factors that marked Korean society in recent history, probably the process of urbanization has been the most important to consider for understanding the new forms of group-community construction. The consequences of the rural-urban transformation process led to new ways of understanding the relationships and social connections. Traditionally the blood and regional ties were maintained throughout life in a stable manner and served to identify the group and the individuals inside it. This new social situation of change and transformation will affect the identity of groups and individuals. The groups will become much less stable and group members will share feelings, interests and ideologies of smaller scale and will not be so defined by family or geographical boundaries (Kim, 2003).

Among the new groups that will emerge from the 80s in the context of urbanized large cities were those formed, driven by common interests like the groups of former school, college, university students; fellow company and factory members, business and religious groups, members of the same region, city, town (same place of origin); political resistance groups, environmental groups, etc.

More recently new youth groups, new youth urban tribes, are emerging. Special mention is needed of those created around the K-pop idols fans-clubs, K-drama, K-movies, computer games, ... Groups borne out of the new Korean popular culture. (Choi, Hahm, Kim, Kim & Lee, 2011).

The new groups that have emerged in the current Korean society are becoming creators of identity from a more limited concept. A "we, uri", a group identity, which takes different forms depending on the physical and ideological spaces where they are built.

Another factor to consider in this process of identity construction is the fast economic evolution of Korea and the connection of Korea with the globe through new technologies of communication and transport. These new trends are also confronting the traditional ideas of identity by providing new spaces that challenge, collaborate or accommodate the traditional discourse on Korean community-group. In addition, the increasing engagement of Korea with the international economy has transformed the sense of space in new ways. These new relationships have softened old concepts of territory through the increase of cheap long distance flights, and the Internet. In this regard, it is possible to talk since the end of 20th century of a complex process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization of Korean identity.

This study is intended to focus in this new territorialization of Korean identity in the new groups emerging in Korea and outside Korea because of their international experiences of exchange with foreign students and their culture context. How they are developing their own subcultures within a more comprehensive and wider way to understand what it means to be Korean today.

Background of the Research: University of Malaga's Korean Program

University of Malaga (UMA) is located in the city of Malaga in the region of Andalusia, Spain. The university counts with more than 37,000 students (35,000 undergraduates, 2200 Master students and 600 doctorate program students) in 11 colleges. Within this structure, the university counts nowadays with a full BA degree on Korean Studies, and an office devoted to exchanges of researchers, students and businessman between Spain and Korea, working from an integral perspective.

Korea is nowadays a very influential country that cannot be ignored in order to understand the reality of the world in general, and East Asia in particular. The high economic development of the country, the political stability of its democratic government, or the powerful influence of Korean popular culture are just some of the reasons behind this influence. In that regard, it is important to understand the Korean reality from a broad perspective, in order to apprehend the impact of the country in the region, and the international scene. Obviously, such understanding must be rooted in a comprehensive study of Korean culture, taking in consideration its long cultural tradition, the historical development of the country, and its ability to receive and reinterpret foreign traditions. For that reason, the University of Malaga has worked since 2006 to promote the understanding of Korea in Spain, as well as it has been a strong advocate and supporter of exchanges between both countries. With that in mind, the University of Malaga has developed since 2010 an integral project of internationalization that has focused on Korea, teaming up with other local agents, to provoke a comprehensive change in Spain towards Korea. This project led by the university and partnering up with the Incheon National University aims to promote academic, institutional and economic exchanges with Korean universities, institutions and companies in order to construct a fluid channel of communication, exchange and creation between both countries.

One of the most important projects that the University of Malaga has developed to further the internationalization of Malaga with Korea has been the creation of BA degree on Korean Studies, and departmental area on Korean Studies. The creation of these two structures, highly interwoven, is the institutional answer of the university, as higher education institution, in relation to the internationalization with Korea. The BA degree, inaugurated in 2011, aims to train professionals able to work as cultural intermediaries between the Spanish-speaking world and the Korean world. The creation of the degree had to adjust to Spanish regulations for University degrees, and the official name is degree on East Asian Studies. However, this degree allows further specialization in specific countries: China, Japan or Korea. The university, in its objective of developing its project of internationalization with Korea, developed the degree on East Asia with the University of Seville with the objective of leaving the University of Seville to concentrate in the specialization of Japanese and Chinese studies, leaving to the University of Malaga the opportunity to focus exclusively on Korean Studies. Thus, the University of Malaga became at that moment the only Spanish university with a degree focused exclusively on Korean studies. Therefore, the objective of the university is to educate professionals able to bridge the Spanish-speaking world and Korea. In order to do so, these professional are not proficient just in Korean language, but develop as well a set of skills in terms of cultural knowledge about Korea that will facilitate their future job as intermediaries between both cultural regions. During the first two years students receive general training on aspects of East Asia as a background, and during the following two years, students specializes on Korea. The degree is organized from a multidisciplinary perspective teaching courses

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on different issues such as history, arts, literature, philosophy, religion, economy, business and trade, intercultural communication and Korean language. The degree counts nowadays with more than 200 students enrolled in the four-year long program.

Furthermore, the university has invested in developing a new area of knowledge at the university to research and teach about Korea. The area gathers a total of 3 full-time scholars, one part-time professor, and a lecturer. Also, professors from prestigious universities are invited to give lectures on diverse topics on Korean Studies. So far, we have been able to bring each year around five to six professors from Universities such as University of Rome La Sapienza, University of Copenhagen, SOAS University of London, Seoul National University or Incheon National University. They all teach and research about different aspects of Korean culture and experience. Thus, there is one language professor and a lecturer devoted to the teaching and researching of Korean language education as second language. Meanwhile, the rest of professors focus their research activity on different aspects of Korean culture and history, from religion to performing arts, passing through cultural history. In fact, as part of the project to develop this area of knowledge, the university has been funding one PhD student to finish his thesis on Korean history, showing the institutional compromise with the development of Korean Studies in the Spanish-speaking world.

One of the first activities that the Area of Korean Studies has been involved in is a research project focused on improving the efficiency of teaching Korean language to Spanish-speaking students, starting in 2013 and continuing until today. This project has been developed within the frame of the Research Programs on Innovative Education that the University of Malaga organizes. The research project designed by the East Asian Studies Area has aimed to adapt the Korean language educative material to the specific characteristic of Spanish-speakers, at the same time that researched on better practices to convey the teaching of Korean language.

The University is constructing a specialized library to support the teaching of the Korean Studies degree. Thanks to a grant from the National Library of Korea in 2012, University of Malaga formed the seed of the library with around 3,500 books on diverse topics related to Korea. Another source for the library has been the generous grants received from the Korea Foundation. In addition, the library has been increasing with its own resources the collection, tailoring the needs of the students and researchers. Nowadays, the library counts with about 5,000 books on Korea.

Moreover, the University of Malaga has launched several Exchange programs and partnerships to support and further the connections with Korea at all levels. This parallel system has a strong impact on the students of the BA on Korean Studies and the researchers related with Korea because it facilitates the exchange dynamics between both countries. The first of those parallel projects are the exchange programs. As a result, the University of Malaga has exchanged about 400 students since 2010 with 12 partner Universities from South Korea. Among them, University of Malaga has a close relationship with Incheon National University that translate into a much intense exchange as part of the larger project of collaboration signed in 2011.

The relation between the Incheon National University and the University of Malaga is a successful case of the internationalization strategy UMA has been following since 2006. After some previous contacts, both universities signed in 2011 a comprehensive agreement of exchange and collaboration aiming to multiply student exchanges, academic collaborations, and economic ties between Malaga and Incheon. One of the main results of such agreement was the establishment of a representative office of each university on the campus of the other university. That was the birth of the

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Office of Incheon National University at UMA, that later evolved into the Office “International Bridge with Korea”. Currently, the University of Malaga also counts with a representative Office of the University of Malaga at Incheon National University. Thus, the communication and collaboration between both universities is greatly facilitated and channelled into permanent structures, securing their development through specific projects. In order to carry out the mission of connecting both countries, the Office employs a qualified Korean-Spanish speaking team in charge of managing projects according to the necessities of the Korean Studies BA. Some of those projects have attended to the development and support of joint research seminars and projects; exchanges of professors and students, attending specially to their reception at Malaga; or the organization of parallel activities related to the education of students such the celebration of the TOPIK exam or linguistic exchanges between Korean and Spanish students. The Korean Program at the University of Malaga has managed different projects together with Korean institutions:

- 6 Korean Culture Week, from 2009 to 2015
- 8th and 10th Spain-Korea Forum
- Korea Foundation Visiting Professor Program
- Korea Foundation Global Challengers program, Korean Language Internship
- 12nd Korean Studies Graduate Students Convention.
- 1st Ibero-American meeting on Korean Studies
- Korea-México-Spain Scholarship program
- 1st and 2nd Korean oratory contest in Spain
- National Library of Korea grant *Windows on Korea*
- 8 Korean Literature Essay Contest
- Korean writers residence program
- 1st Korean-Spanish translation course.
- European mobility program *Erasmus+* for student and university with Korea
- Research mobility program Korea-UMA for Spanish researchers
- Internship mobility program Incheon National University-UMA

Furthermore, the Office “International Bridge with Korea” has also consolidated a closed relationship with Latin American institutions interested in developing Korean Studies projects. Last year, University of Malaga organized through the Office “International Bridge with Korea” the 1st Ibero-American meeting on Korean Studies with the objective of assessing the status of the Korean Studies in the Ibero-American region, and establishing the bases for future development. Around 80 participants from 8 different countries took part in the event, creating the Ibero-American Network of Korean Studies.

The University of Malaga, due to its tradition and position in Spain, has always recognized its connection with Latin America as one of its strengths, and for that reason, they were also part of the integral project of internationalization with Korea. For that reason, the University of Malaga was working intensively in the development of, and connection with Latin American universities with interest in Korean Studies. Thus, the aim of the University of Malaga is connecting all Spanish-speaking universities interested in Korea to further the level of exchanges with Korea, and the level of collaboration among the universities to bring Korean studies further in the Spanish-speaking world. In that regard, the University of Malaga has partner up with several universities in the region, and especially with Mexico, to carry out such vision. Thus, the University of Malaga started in 2015 several contacts and projects with the Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon (UANL) in Monterrey, Mexico, and its Center of Asian Studies, as a first step. Some of those projects were:

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- Korea-Spain-México scholarship program: thanks to a grant from The Korea Foundation, three students from the University of Malaga have the possibility of studying one semester in each university (Incheon National University and Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon).
- UMA graduate students working in Center of Asian Studies- Autonomous University of Nuevo Leon. During the current year, three UMA graduate students will work as Korean language professor.
- E-learning program: 3 professor from de Department of Korean Studies participate on a MOOC course on Korean Studies targeting Latin American students. The University Autonomous of Nuevo Leon in cooperation with The Korea Foundation organizes this program. Many universities in Latin America are members of the program. This network is one of the most important experiences in the teaching of Korean Studies in the Spanish-speaking world.
- Attendance to Latin America Meetings on Korean Studies. Since the organization of the 1st Ibero-American Meetings on Korean Studies at UMA, the Department of Korean Studies has participated in two Latin America Meetings on Korean Studies in México and Colombia.

This first step aims to sum up some of the main actors in the region to collaborate in the development of Korean studies in Latin America, at the same time that a transnational network of universities connecting Korea, Europe and Latin America. In order to consolidate such connections among universities and regions, the University of Malaga needs to upgrade the structures already in place. On the one hand, it is necessary to further the education of the students interested in Korea, so they can become the kind of professionals able to bridge efficiently these regions, America, Korea and Spain. On the other hand, it is necessary as well to develop a solid research project at the University of Malaga that holds together the program in Spain, but also that connects with our colleges in Latin America, furthering our collective understanding of Korea.

Korea-Spain Academic Exchange: Ethnographic Research

In degrees such as East Asian Studies – Korean Studies at the University of Malaga the flow of students through university exchanges is essential for its consolidation. However, inter-university relations, which can target in a specific way the training of exchange students in the different universities, are in many cases lacking of a master plan. This shortcoming is perceived from our teaching experience.

We therefore believe that an investigation focusing on the analysis of some aspects of these social flows created by the university exchange programs can:

- Support a more coherent academic and extracurricular management in the process of consolidating undergraduate and emerging post-graduate degrees, such as East Asian Studies East – Korean Studies at the University of Malaga
- Laying the foundation for building a solid educational structure between the University of Malaga and Korean universities.

The analysis of these specific aspects of social flows in the academic exchange intends to be implemented from the following sample of university population:

- Students under the program of academic mobility from the Korean Universities (UMA destination).

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- Students under the program of academic mobility that leave from the University of Malaga (Korean Universities destination).
- Professors of Korean universities and the University of Malaga.

Ethnographic research objectives

General Objectives

- To Analyse academic social flows between Korean universities and the University of Malaga.
- To strengthen the academic social structure among Korean universities and the University of Malaga.

Specific Objectives

- To know the expectations, processes and social relations done during the academic exchanges between students of Korean universities and the University of Malaga.
- To analyse how the college experience is built at Korean universities and the University of Malaga.
- To investigate how different social relations are constructed and represented during academic exchanges.
- Designing of an academic framework of inter-university cooperation aimed at developing a core of academic activities for exchange students involved in the program.
- Promoting actions and joint academic projects among professors of Korean Universities and the University of Malaga.

Methodology

The qualitative methodology is most suitable for this kind of research, because it allows the analysis and interpretation of phenomena from observable facts and speeches, at the same time that search their social meanings.

In this regard, within qualitative methodology, the ethnographic method is the one that can allow us to analyse the academic social flows in their social and cultural contexts of meaning.

The main research techniques will be the participant and non-participant observation; informal and in-depth interviews - open, structured and semi-structured. Digital recorder, video and/or photography as well as in the essential field journals will record ethnographic information.

Frameworks for analysing research objectives

1. Experience of Korean Students coming from Korean Universities to the University of Malaga (UMA destination)

This framework of analysis is established with the aim of understanding expectations, processes and creation of social relations of Korean students. How social relations are constructed during their stay at the University of Malaga and what are their meanings.

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In this regard, we propose to investigate aspects such as: the importance of academic experience in students' vital processes construction, future expectations of students on arrival at their destination UMA, the rhythms of study at the Korean Universities and the University of Malaga, representations they have of academic relationships at the University of Malaga (once academic exchange in the UMA is completed), the degree of penetration of Korean students in the Spanish-Malaga culture from different contexts of meaning (social , cultural, economic, tourism ...) and social relations constructed from these contexts, etc.

This anthropological-social research is proposed from a three-time ethnographic work in order to interpret, from a comparative analysis, the way in which the university experience UMA destination is built. Therefore, we contemplate:

- First, observation and interviews (informal and in depth) to all Korean students on arrival at UMA from Korean universities.
- Second, observation and interviews (informal and in depth) to a representative sample of Korean students during their academic exchange period at the University of Malaga.
- Third, observation and interviews (informal and in depth) before the departure of Korean students in their return to their home universities.

We propose a design ethnographic fieldwork for the reception and departure of exchange students from Korean universities with two protocols:

- Welcoming protocol of the Korean students arriving in the University of Malaga.
- Sending Protocol of Korean students before returning to their home universities.

In this sense, the two proposed protocols should be understood as a general interview of the students with two distinct parts:

- A first part for recording information of an institutional nature for the University of Malaga (to be developed by a technician responsible from the university itself).
- A second part (independent of the first) to record specific information for the research project (to be developed by project researchers).

2. Experience of Malaga Students coming from the University of Malaga to the Korean Universities (Korea destination)

In the same way as for the analytical framework of Korean students, the present framework of analysis for the students of the University of Malaga is established in order to understand expectations, processes and creation of social relations of Malaga students. How social relations are constructed during their stay at Korean universities and what are their meanings.

In this regard, we propose, the same as in the previous framework, to investigate aspects such as: the importance of academic experience in students' vital processes construction, future expectations of students on arrival at their Korea destination, the rhythms of study at the Korean Universities and the University of Malaga, representations they have of academic relationships at Korean universities (once academic exchange in Korea is completed), the degree of penetration of Malaga

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students in the Korean culture from different contexts of meaning (social , cultural, economic, tourism ...) and social relations constructed from these contexts, etc.

The Anthropological-social research in this second analysis framework has also a three-time ethnographic work to understand and interpret, from a comparative analysis, the way in which the Malaga students experience in Korea is built. In this sense, we contemplate:

- First, observation and interviews (informal and in-depth) before the departure of students from the University of Malaga to Korean universities.
- Second, observation and interviews (informal and in depth) to a representative sample of Malaga students during their academic exchange period at Korean universities.
- Third, observation and interviews (informal and in-depth) to the return of students of the University of Malaga from Korean universities.

In the same sense of methodological rigor alluded to the first framework of analysis for Korean students arriving in Malaga, we propose here also to make the design of a fieldwork protocol for reception and departure of Malaga students.

- Sending protocol to students before their departure to Korea.
- Return Protocol to Malaga students on their arrival from Korea.

Both protocols will be integrated equally in the institutional routines of International Relations and Cooperation Office at the University of Malaga and the UMA-Atech Bridge with Korea Office. Likewise, the two protocols proposed for Malaga students can be understood as a general interview with two distinct parts:

- First, for recording information of an institutional nature of the University of Malaga (to be developed by a technician responsible from the university itself).
- Second (independent of the first) for recording information specific to the research project (to be developed by any member of the research project team).

3. Mechanisms and academic, institutional and administrative proceedings of the universities involved in the project.

The third analysis framework aims to research, both by students and by professors, mechanisms and academic, institutional and administrative proceedings of the universities involved in the project.

Speaking of tasks aimed at seeking information and documentation about mechanisms and academic, institutional and administrative proceedings we refer, for example, to: universities degrees, subjects and educational programming, Doctoral programs, Office of attention to exchange students, International Relations Office protocols for exchange students, etc.

The information collected by exchange students will be given to the research team upon his return from Korean universities to use: 1) as a support in the final design of the interviews, 2) as a material imperative for a specific design of the exchange students' internships in Korean universities and 3) as an academic, institutional and administrative material to be considered for the analysis and final writing of the research project.

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4. Inter-university academic cooperation activities between the University of Malaga and Korean universities.

First-hand knowledge, both by students and by professors, of university mechanisms and proceedings enhance a better inter-university cooperation. We understand that this cooperation is essential for the design and implementation of core academic activities.

Strengthening the social-academic framework among Korean universities and the University of Malaga springs from the Inter-University Cooperation:

- Through contact among professors from Korean universities and the University of Malaga.
- Creation of joint programs among Korean universities and the University of Malaga.
- Sharing internship programs among Korean universities and the University of Malaga.

Ethnographic Work Timing

The ethnographic work has been design in a three years timeline. We are at the moment in the first year of the research and these are the main activities plan for this year:

- Preparing interview scripts.
- Preparation of observation guides.
- Preparation of the interviews protocols.
- Design and provisional proposal (pilot) for the internship work to be developed in Korean universities by Malaga University students.
- Contact with Korean universities professors to organize joint inter-university cooperation programs.
- First contacts with Korean students in their arrival to the University of Malaga (observations and informal interviews to outline the definitive in-depth interviews and identify the sample of people who eventually will be studied).
- First contacts with the University of Malaga students with Korea destination (observations and informal interviews to outline the definitive in-depth interviews and identify the sample of people who eventually will be studied).
- Transcription and systematization of the first observations and informal interviews.
- Receipt and review of the first materials compiled by the Malaga University exchange students on his return from Korea.

Starting the ethnographic work: Interviews

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We are at the moment in the first phase of the ethnographic work designing of the interviews scripts and their distribution among Korean students in Malaga and Malaga students in Korea.

Some of the questions we have prepared are the following:

First, we have a set of general information question about the estudent: name, age, studies, etc.

Second, questions about the student's family: parents, brothers and sisters, jobs, economic situation...

Third, some more specific questions about their expectations and motivation to come to Malaga or going to Korea: What has led you to apply for academic mobility?; Why in Malaga, Korea?; What difficulties have you found your arrival to Malaga, to Korea?; Have been solved and how?; How do you think will be your academic life in Malaga, in Korea during these months?

Fourth, question about academic and personal life in Korea, Malaga: How many hours a week do you have in your Faculty of origin?; How many hours per week you spend studying in Korea, in Malaga?; Do you consider it enough?; How many hours per week devoted to go out with friends in Korea, in Malaga?; Do you have a boy-girl friend in Korea, in Malaga?; How many hours a day dedicated to social networks in Korea, in Spain (Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Kakao, ...)?

Fifth, more specific questions about their experience in Malaga or Korea: How do you think will be your social life in Malaga, Korea during these months of mobility?; Estimated monthly spending during your stay in Malaga, Korea in the following items (specify approximate amounts): Accommodation, Maintenance, Transport in the city, Clothes, Cosmetics, Telephone and internet, going out with friends, tourism,...; Explain what you know of Malaga when in Korea, of Korea when in Malaga; What do you think you will miss from your life in Korea during your staying in Malaga, in Malaga during your staying in Korea?; What do you think you will take from your experience in Malaga to Korea, in Korea to Malaga?

Conclusion

These are the first steps in this research project that we hope will help us to understand better the identity-construction processes that are taking place among Korean and Spanish young people living in the global world of today. This understanding also will help the educational institutions to improve their programs of exchange students at international level.

There are emerging areas that are creating a new way of understanding relations between individuals. They are creating new connections between people that sometimes are even stronger than the traditional ties that were used to give cohesion to the various groups in society.

The Korean and Spanish identity is an amalgam of national, group and individual identities, which are interrelated and in continuous flow and transformation. They are a reflection of hybridization that currently exists between the traditional and the modern, the local and the global, the self and the other.

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