

When research is suspiciously dishonest: chairs funded by polluting companies, greenwashing, and genocide washing

Cuando la investigación es sospechosamente deshonesto: cátedras pagadas por empresas sucias, *greenwashing* y *genocide washing*

Quando a investigação é suspeitosamente desonesta: cátedras financiadas por empresas poluidoras, *greenwashing* e *genocide washing*

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Abstract

The article denounces that certain university chairs are being financed by private companies and that they can function as instruments to distort scientific information and legitimize bad practices. It is argued that, although university-business collaboration is necessary and positive, there is a significant risk of bias when funders directly or indirectly condition the results, generating knowledge aligned with economic interests and not with the public interest or scientific truth. In this context, the proliferation of these chairs is interpreted as a form of greenwashing, with which companies -especially from controversial sectors- seek to improve their image through their association with academic institutions, eroding scientific credibility and social trust in the university as a guarantor of objectivity and rigor. On the other hand, it also denounces the fact that some Spanish universities participate with Israeli entities in EU R&D projects, which for many people is considered intolerable in the context of the genocide that Israel is committing against its neighbours in Palestine and Lebanon.

Keywords: Scientific bias, critical research, university chairs, scientific ethics, eco-whitewashing, academic capitalism, critical thinking.

Resumen

El artículo denuncia que determinadas cátedras universitarias están siendo financiadas por empresas privadas y que pueden funcionar como instrumentos para falsear información científica y legitimar malas prácticas. Se sostiene que, aunque la colaboración universidad-empresa es necesaria y positiva, existe un riesgo significativo de sesgo cuando los financiadores condicionan directa o indirectamente los resultados, generando conocimiento alineado con intereses económicos y no con el interés público o la verdad científica. En este contexto, se interpreta la proliferación de estas cátedras como una forma de *greenwashing* (lavado verde) con el que compañías -especialmente de sectores controvertidos- buscan mejorar su imagen mediante su asociación con instituciones académicas, erosionando la credibilidad científica y la confianza social en la universidad como garante de objetividad y rigor. Por otra parte, también se pretende denunciar que hay universidades españolas que participan con entidades israelíes en proyectos de I+D de la UE, lo cual es para

muchas personas algo intolerable en el contexto del genocidio que está cometiendo Israel contra sus vecinos de Palestina y Líbano.

Palabras clave: Rigor científico, investigación crítica, cátedras universitarias, ética científica, greenwashing, capitalismo académico, pensamiento crítico.

Resumo

Este artigo denuncia o facto de certas cátedras universitárias estarem a ser financiadas por empresas privadas e que podem funcionar como instrumentos para falsificar informação científica e legitimar práticas inadequadas. Defende-se que, embora a colaboração entre a universidade e a indústria seja necessária e positiva, existe um risco significativo de viés quando os financiadores influenciam direta ou indiretamente os resultados, gerando conhecimento alinhado com interesses económicos em vez do interesse público ou da verdade científica. Neste contexto, a proliferação destas cátedras é interpretada como uma forma de greenwashing, em que as empresas -sobretudo as de sectores controversos- procuram melhorar a sua imagem associando-se a instituições académicas, corroendo a credibilidade científica e a confiança pública nas universidades como garantes de objectividade e rigor. Além disso, o artigo visa também denunciar o facto de algumas universidades espanholas estarem a participar com entidades israelitas em projectos de I&D da UE, o que muitos consideram intolerável no contexto do genocídio perpetrado por Israel contra os seus vizinhos na Palestina e no Líbano.

Palavras-chave: Rigor científico, investigação crítica, cátedras universitárias, ética científica, greenwashing, capitalismo académico, pensamento crítico.

Introduction

After exposing the questionable tactics used by some museums to secure funding from corporations seeking to improve their public image (Galindo, 2020a), at Blogsostenible we turned our attention to the strategies employed by certain companies within universities, particularly through the funding of “research” chairs (Galindo, 2020b). Since then, the situation has only worsened. Even a non-exhaustive investigation has revealed further conflicts of interest and indications of image laundering in collaborations between corporations and universities.

Should we always trust science? Unfortunately, there are many cases in which the label of “science” is attached to work shaped by private interests. One well-known example can be found in the pharmaceutical industry (Galindo, 2015a). Alongside the names of the authors of every scientific study, the identity of whoever funded the research should appear prominently. Investigating these relationships of purely economic interest is generally difficult. Nevertheless, some evidence is impossible to ignore: university chairs funded by private corporations may be used not to conduct

independent research, but to produce studies tailored to corporate interests. At times, the practice is so blatant that it is surprising to see companies and universities forging such ethically dubious relationships purely for financial gain, sidelining both genuine scientific inquiry and service to society (Galindo, 2020b). If this is already deeply problematic, the scandal becomes even greater when it occurs within public universities.

Of course, this is not to suggest that companies should not support research. Ideally, they should. What is unacceptable, however, is for research outcomes to be conditioned by the interests of those financing them, even where there is merely a reasonable suspicion of influence. To use a straightforward analogy: terrorists should not come to lecture us on fraternal love, even if their intentions appear sincere. Universities must not only conduct objective research, but also appear objective in the eyes of society (Galindo, 2020b).

Methodology

Unfortunately, we can no longer trust a study simply because it bears the logo of a particular university (Galindo, 2020b). We attempt to demonstrate this claim through a concise selection of universities that appear suspiciously aligned with private interests. All the information presented here is publicly available, often on the universities' own websites and, more specifically, on the webpages of the chairs discussed. These issues have also been covered in the written press.

In essence, the methodology consisted of evaluating whether the research content and objectives of a university chair conflict with the interests of the company financing it. For example, it is reasonable for a meat-processing company to fund research into the properties of meat, but if the stated objective is exclusively to evaluate its "health benefits," then a clear bias exists within the research framework. Conflicts of interest should always be disclosed in scientific publications funded by for-profit organizations. However, such disclosures are frequently absent. In some cases, the sponsor of the study is omitted entirely, or its identity is diluted among a long list of funders represented only through logos.

We also found cases in which companies fund chairs devoted to highly noble and desirable goals, while failing to implement even basic measures within their own organizations to achieve those same objectives.

The purpose of this study is not to determine whether the research produced by these chairs is correct or incorrect, but rather to highlight a series of evident conflicts of interest that remain undeclared in both their publications and their institutional communications, including their websites. In light of these facts, it is reasonable to suspect that the primary purpose of these chairs and their publications may be less about pursuing genuine improvement or constructive criticism of corporate practices than about supporting and promoting the activities of the sponsoring company. In some cases, given the very limited number of scientific publications produced by these chairs, what emerges instead is a clear attempt to launder the company's public image—a process which, when linked to environmental

issues, is commonly referred to as greenwashing.

In many instances, these controversial studies are disseminated less within scientific circles than among the general public or specific social sectors, such as company employees or the communities in which these corporations operate. In this sense, the studies may function to justify the activities of the sponsoring companies and provide pseudoscientific arguments in their defense. As Naomi Klein (2015) has argued, populations economically dependent on fossil fuel extraction are more likely to embrace climate change denial. She demonstrated that this tendency existed regardless of political ideology, both in the United States and Canada. In other words, when a person's livelihood or the economic stability of a region depends on a particular corporation, affected populations are more likely to accept arguments defending that corporation without questioning whether the associated research is objective or compromised by conflicts of interest.

Results: University Chairs with Evident Conflicts of Interest

Without claiming to provide an exhaustive analysis of every chair at every Spanish university, this study examines eleven universities and only a selection of their most controversial chairs.

1. Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha: A meat-processing company funds the Incarlopsa Chair so that the “nutritional and health benefits” of meat can be openly promoted (UCLM, 2026a). The conclusions are effectively predetermined before the research even begins, and this is stated explicitly. Scientific objectivity is undermined and dismissed outright (Galindo, 2020b). The same university also hosts the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Chair funded by Banco Santander (UCLM, 2026b), a bank that has been widely criticized, among other reasons, for financing the arms industry and numerous highly polluting corporations (Robaina, 2020). What kind of responsibility is actually being studied there? It would be preferable for Banco Santander to apply CSR principles to its own operations before attempting to present itself as a moral authority on the subject (Galindo, 2020b).

2. Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM): A company whose waste-management practices have been widely criticized funds the Ecoembes Chair. Unsurprisingly, its conclusions consistently portray Ecoembes' work as exemplary. The company also openly finances newspapers and journalists to ensure that the media remain favorable toward some of the largest plastic polluters. Through this chair, grants are awarded to professionals specialized in preserving the throwaway consumption model (Galindo, 2020b), while researchers at other universities—including the University of Alicante, the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, and the University of Alcalá—have also been drawn into supporting similar objectives, as denounced by Alberto Vizcaíno (2019), Liliane Spendeler (2016), and Greenpeace (Galindo, 2019). Moreover, the EcoTextil initiative operates from the same premises as the Ecoembes Chair and appears to pursue the same logic for clothing that Ecoembes promotes for packaging: the normalization of disposable consumption (Galindo, 2020b). At the same Polytechnic University of Madrid (UPM), one also finds the Iberdrola

Chair (Center for Innovation in Technology for Human Development, 2026) dedicated to the Sustainable Development Goals, which, one might assume, investigates how to violate those goals without attracting excessive public scrutiny (Galindo, 2020b). Had Iberdrola been genuinely committed to sustainability, it would have shut down its nuclear and combined-cycle power plants many years ago (Malló, 2022).

3. Universidad Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona): This university hosts the Mercadona Chair in “Circular Economy.” It should be noted that Mercadona is one of the shareholder companies represented on the board of Ecoembes. Moreover, supermarkets are among the largest distributors of single-use plastics. Mercadona, one of the most commercially successful supermarket chains in Spain and Portugal, now positions itself as an authority on circular economy practices. Greater coherence would perhaps be found if the Mercadona Chair were instead titled “Economics Toward Collapse” (Galindo, 2020b). At the same university, another chair follows the example set by the Polytechnic University of Madrid by producing headlines tailored to the interests of companies that profit from disposable packaging (Vizcaíno, 2019). The issue here is that this chair is not directly funded by a corporation, but rather by the United Nations (Galindo, 2020b). It is the UNESCO Chair in Life Cycle and Climate Change which, notably, runs programs financed by Ecoembes, Ecovidrio, and Tetra Pak—Spain’s major corporate actors in single-use plastic, glass, and carton packaging respectively (UNESCO Chair in Life Cycle and Climate Change ESCI-UPF, 2026).

4. Universidad Jaume I (Castellón de la Plana): The BP Chair in Industrial Environment bears an appealing name, but it is unlikely to be investigating how to shut down BP itself, despite the company being regarded by many critics as one of the most environmentally destructive corporations in the world (Borgstrom, 2023; Cossins-Smith, 2023; Galindo, 2020b; Universitat Jaume I, 2026).

5. Universidad de Málaga (UMA). Some of the chairs hosted by this university clearly deserve inclusion on our list on their own merits:

- **Climate Change Chair.** This chair is funded by the cement company Votorantim Cimentos España (formerly FYM-HeidelbergCement Group), identified as the most polluting industrial operation in Málaga (Rivas, 2020). The University of Málaga appears willing to accept its “dirty” money without any evident reservations. One must ask: would a cement company truly finance an objective study on climate change? Or is it more plausible that such funding serves as a form of greenwashing? Can the sustainability of the city of Málaga be studied credibly without calling for the closure or relocation of such a dangerous and polluting industry? The University of Málaga seems to show little concern for either its institutional prestige or the health of the city’s residents (Galindo, 2020b). A study conducted by the Carlos III Health Institute assessed cancer mortality rates among populations living within a five-kilometer radius of cement plants, concluding that residing near such facilities poses a

significant health risk (García-Pérez et al., 2015).

- Chair of studies of Catholic brotherhoods. This chair is not regarded with pride by all researchers at the University of Málaga (Galindo, 2020b), as it appears to function more as a mechanism for transferring funding and institutional prestige to religious brotherhoods than as a center for producing meaningful scientific research (Aguilera, 2021; Cenizo, 2018).
- Chair of Corporate Social Responsibility. Another chair funded by the aforementioned Banco Santander, to which we have already referred..
- Hedy Lamarr Chair for Women and Technology (University of Málaga, 2026), whose stated objective is “to increase women’s participation in technology.” The sponsors of this chair include companies such as Accenture, AirZone, Avanade, DEKRA Testing and Certification, Ericsson, Google, Keysight Technologies, Metro Málaga, PREMO, TDK, Corporación Empresarial ALTRA, and NTT DATA Spain. A quick review of the leadership structures within these companies suggests that female representation in decision-making positions is either very limited or entirely absent. Moreover, these corporations do not generally appear to implement effective equality or diversity policies. All of this raises the suspicion that their involvement in the chair may be motivated more by image management than by any genuine commitment to achieving gender parity in the technology sector.
- Chair for the Culture of Diversity and Social Justice (University of Málaga, 2026a): Its stated purpose is “research, cultural development, and social transformation based on respect for diversity of ideas, beliefs, and the multiethnic character of peoples, always grounded in the defense of Human Rights and the pursuit of social justice.” The contradiction here lies in the fact that the chair is funded by the Unicaja Banking Foundation, a corporation that has faced multiple labor disputes (Cadena SER, 2026) and which, like the previously mentioned Banco Santander, does not define itself as a strictly ethical bank. As such, it invests across broad financial markets, including, potentially, controversial sectors such as the arms industry, oil companies, or industries linked to deforestation, among many others (Rodríguez, 2026; Vallejo, 2026). A bank that genuinely seeks to promote “social justice” should first conduct a thorough examination of its own investments and publicly and transparently declare that it will reject any involvement with unethical industries. It is worth remembering that placing one’s money in a genuinely ethical bank is among the five simplest and most influential actions an individual citizen can take, even without holding political office or occupying a position of power (Galindo, 2015b). A bank may reasonably be considered ethical if it explicitly defines itself as such and demonstrates this commitment through transparent Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) criteria applied openly within its financial reporting.

6. Universidad de Sevilla:

- A chemical manufacturing company funds a chair on sustainability (University of Seville, 2026), seemingly overlooking the fact that chemical products themselves are among the principal drivers of environmental unsustainability and biodiversity loss (Galindo, 2020b).
- The same university also hosts a chair named after a bullfighter, the Ignacio Sánchez Mejías Chair (ABC Sevilla, 2008), which, notably, does not even maintain its own website. Other sources indicate that its purpose is to promote “values for the dissemination of bullfighting” (University of Seville, 2018), without considering the evident damage such a chair causes to the university’s public image (del Moral, 2018), nor the harm inflicted upon an animal that science has demonstrated suffers in the same way as any other mammal—even in bloodless bullfights. The suffering is therefore even greater in events where the bull is progressively bled until its final execution in the ring. The AVATMA association (Association of Veterinarians for the Abolition of Bullfighting and Animal Abuse) published a report arguing precisely this point regarding animal suffering in bullfighting practices (2016). Furthermore, many of the traditional arguments advanced in defense of bullfighting—such as its status as a cultural tradition, the preservation of a breed (though not a species), or the claim that animals should not possess rights—can be refuted relatively easily. In this regard, we recommend the short story *El Toro de la Vega* (Galindo, 2015c), which uses a fictional narrative format to dismantle the principal arguments commonly used to defend this cruel tradition.

7. Universidad de La Coruña: The Inditex UDC Chair in AI for Green Algorithms (2026) states that its objective is “to contribute to sustainable development and environmental protection.” However, the Inditex Group has not abandoned the low-cost textile industry model, a system that profits by cutting costs while generating significant social and environmental harm. Inditex is among the companies in the sector with the greatest socio-environmental impact, including low wages, exploitation of workers—primarily women—child labor, and financial practices involving tax havens, among other issues (Galindo, 2020b). Furthermore, the environmental impact of artificial intelligence is itself enormous, to the extent that many voices are now calling for higher taxes on this technology both to curb its expansion and to compensate for its environmental consequences (Galindo, 2026).

8. Universidad de Vigo:

- Naturgy Chair in Energy and Sustainable Development: A fossil fuel company is hardly a credible scientific authority on the subject of sustainability (Centro de Investigación Mariña (CIM) da Universidade de Vigo, 2019; Galindo, 2020b; Rey, 2015).

- o ENCE Chair (La Voz de Galicia, 2001). A company accused of causing severe marine pollution and contributing to the destruction of Galician forests now seeks to position itself as an authority on forest management research (Galindo, 2020b).

9. Universidad Politécnica de Cataluña: This university hosts a Chair in Sustainable Mobility funded by an automobile manufacturer (SEAT), despite the scientific reality that no private automobile can truly be considered sustainable. Similar concerns arise with its Chair in Sustainable Mining, financed by a mining and non-organic fertilizer company (ICL Iberia and Iberpotash), which has been directly implicated in one of Catalonia's longstanding environmental conflicts and has also faced repeated workplace accidents and labor disputes (Galindo, 2020b; Gallego, 2019).

10. Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena: FECOAM, an agricultural and livestock federation, funds a chair devoted to Sustainable Agriculture in the Campo de Cartagena. Over the years, however, it has become evident that sustainable agriculture has not been the primary concern of the farmers and ranchers associated with this federation in Murcia. If there is any doubt, one need only consider the case of the Mar Menor: an environmental disaster comparable in scale to the Prestige oil spill or the Aznalcóllar mining catastrophe. The previously mentioned company ICL also finances another chair at this university focused on sustainability in agriculture. In addition, yet another chair is dedicated to studying the "sustainability of irrigation systems," funded by the irrigators associated with the Tagus-Segura water transfer system (SCRATS), a water transfer project widely regarded as environmentally unsustainable (Galindo, 2020b), and whose diverted water has contributed significantly and decisively to the ecological degradation of the Mar Menor.

11. Universidad Politécnica de Valencia: It hosts the Bayer Chair, which claims to conduct research into sustainable agriculture, despite the fact that Bayer is one of the corporations most closely associated with industrial and environmentally unsustainable agricultural practices (Galindo, 2020b; Universitat Politècnica de València, 2020).

Collaborations Between Spanish Universities and Israeli Institutions in a Context of Genocide

Furthermore, recent investigations have revealed that several Spanish universities were participating alongside Israeli institutions in European Union R&D projects (De Fortuny et al., 2024). Regardless of the specific subject matter of these projects, it is, quite evidently, unethical to collaborate with a country accused of committing genocide in full view of the international community, so openly that even the United Nations itself has characterized the situation in such terms in the report *Genocide in Gaza: A Collective Crime*, written by Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese (2025). In that report, responsibility for the Palestinian tragedy is attributed not only to Israel, but also directly to those states that have enabled it through silence, trade, and arms transfers. For this reason, we consider collaboration with a country carrying out such acts to be entirely incomprehensible and believe that, although ending such cooperation may not by itself stop the genocide, collective action in that

direction could nevertheless contribute to saving thousands or even millions of lives.

The aforementioned study by De Fortuny and Bohigas identified four Spanish public universities collaborating with Israeli entities: the University of Vigo, the Polytechnic University of Madrid, the University of Burgos, and the University of Navarra. It is worth noting that two of these universities had already appeared in the previous sections of our analysis, and that this study does not even include other forms of collaboration with companies or universities linked to the state accused of carrying out the genocide against the Palestinian people.

Beyond university partnerships, the 1995 Association Agreement between Israel and the European Union explicitly establishes respect for human rights and democratic principles as essential conditions. Israel has been accused of violating human rights and disregarding United Nations resolutions virtually since its establishment as a state in 1948. For this reason, prominent intellectuals of the time, including Einstein, Arendt, and Freud, chose not to support the State of Israel and denounced it as fascistic after recognizing that the Zionist project of creating “a homeland for the Jewish people” also involved a program of ethnic cleansing in Historic Palestine (Montoya, 2025).

Even setting aside the constant media coverage documenting the devastation in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon, the repeated condemnations expressed through numerous United Nations resolutions, the Albanese report (2025), and the ruling of the International Court of Justice provide more than sufficient grounds to justify the suspension of all forms of cooperation with Israel, particularly the EU-Israel Agreement, as has been demanded by countries such as Spain and Ireland, along with numerous actors within civil society.

Conclusions

We have shown that certain university chairs funded by corporations appear more concerned with laundering their public image than with contributing genuine scientific knowledge to society. There are many more chairs financed by ethically questionable companies such as Endesa, Iberdrola, or Cepsa, but we have not included them here because we did not identify sufficiently clear evidence of direct conflicts of interest. For example, they do not explicitly claim that their purpose is sustainability. Returning to the analogy introduced earlier: it may not be ethical for terrorists to conduct research into explosives, but at least it would be internally coherent.

In many cases, it is large corporations that sponsor research, whether through university chairs or through other mechanisms such as scientific associations or research projects. Many of these major corporations in Spain are listed on the IBEX 35 stock index, meaning they are large-scale companies whose social and environmental impacts cannot be ignored and may in fact be highly significant (Galindo, 2020c). In some cases, these conflicts are extremely evident (Galindo, 2022), and it has been suggested that public awareness and social pressure may help mitigate them (Galindo, 2017). Nevertheless, such measures can never replace the need for adequate legislation, as well as effective oversight and sanctions to ensure compliance.

Our intention has not been to launch a generalized critique of science as a whole, nor of private-sector collaboration in research, but rather to emphasize that there are companies for which it is easy to suspect attempts to manipulate scientific production and that, consequently, we should remain highly demanding regarding what is presented as a “scientific study.”

For years, science has been warning us about the deeply unsustainable nature of our way of life and about the changes required to improve it. In theory, these warnings are reluctantly acknowledged; in practice, however, they are rejected through our everyday actions. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that society trusts science... except when science tells us something we do not wish to hear. Perhaps this explains why the subordination of universities to private interests does not provoke the public scandal it should. Allowing ourselves to be deceived by narratives shaped according to what others want us to hear should always provoke outrage (Galindo, 2020b).

Harari (2014) warned that research is conditioned by funding and ultimately responds to political, economic, or religious interests. Cases as extreme as those presented here should embarrass us all. Not only are research priorities influenced, but dubious scientific studies are also used to manipulate society so that financial benefits continue to flow toward the corporations funding these chairs. This is deeply troubling (Galindo, 2020b), and it is something we should seek to prevent.

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